MarinTrust Whole fish fishery assessment report

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Issued June 2024 – Effective June 2024

Whole Fish Fishery Assessment

Norway Pout (Trisopterus esmarkii), FAO 27, ICES Subarea 4 and Division 3.a (North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat)

Reapproval

WF01

Table 1: Whole fish fishery assessment scope

Fishery name	**Norway - *Trisopterus esmarkii* - Norway Pout - FAO 27, ICES 3.a, 4**
MarinTrust report code	**WF01**
Type 1 species (common name, Latin name)	Norway pout *(Trisopterus esmarkii)*
Fishery location	Norway
Gear type(s)	Small-meshed trawls
Management authority (country/state)	Norway, EU

Table 2: Applicant and Certification Body details

Application details			
Applicant(s)		Pelagia Egersund Sildoljefabrikk, Prima Protein AS, Pelagia Bodø Sildoljefabrikk, TripleNine Vedde AS, Pelagia Karmsund Fiskemel, Pelagia Måløy Sildoljefabrikk, Pelagia Karmsund Protein AS	
Applicant country		Norway	
Certification Body details			
Name of Certification Body		LRQA	
Contact Information for CB (e.g. email address/address/telephone number)		E: mt-ca@lrqa.com LRQA, 4-5 Lochside Way, Edinburgh Park, EH12 9DT T: +44 800 092 0452	
Fishery Assessor name		Blanca Gonzalez	
CB Peer Reviewer name		Sam Peacock	
Number of assessment days	7	**Assessment period (mm/yyyy to mm/yyyy)**	January 2026 to January 2026

Table 3: Assessment outcome

Assessment outcome (See Table 4 for a summary of assessment determination)		*Approve*
Approval validity	Valid from: January 2026	Valid until: January 2027
CB peer reviewer evaluation		*Agree with assessment determination*
Fishery Assessment Peer Review Group external peer reviewer evaluation		*Agree with assessment determination*

Table 4: Assessment determination

Assessment determination Summary of assessment and outcome
This is the first V3 version report for this fishery. The Norway pout (*Trisopterus esmarkii*) assessment for ICES Subarea 4 and Division 3a (North Sea, Skagerrak, and Kattegat) includes 8 species: Norway pout as the target species, blue whiting (*Micromesistius poutassou*), saithe (*Pollachius virens*), herring (*Clupea harengus*), whiting (*Merlangius merlangus*), haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*), horse mackerel (T*rachurus trachurus*), and greater silver smelt (*Argentina silus*) as bycatch. All listed species are categorized as Least Concern by the IUCN, and none are included in any appendix of CITES. Updated catch composition data would be preferable; however, the Norway pout fishery was closed in 2025 to support stock recovery, and a TAC was set exclusively for bycatch. As a result, this report maintains the species categorization from the previous assessment. In that assessment, Norway pout accounted for up to 95% of the total catch and was classified as a Type 1 species, assessed under Category A due to the presence of a targeted management regime with established reference points. The remaining species are estimated to comprise less than 5% of the total catch. Blue whiting, saithe, herring, whiting, haddock, and horse mackerel were assessed as Category C, as all are subject to targeted management regimes with established reference points and annually set TACs. Greater silver smelt was assessed as Category D, as it lacks both a management plan and defined reference points. The reviewed evidence for the Norway pout management framework (M1) indicates that the fishery is overseen by legally mandated authorities, supported by designated institutions responsible for scientific data collection and stock assessment. The system is grounded in principles of sustainable fishing and the precautionary approach, incorporates a transparent consultation process that engages stakeholders in decision-making, and ensures that outcomes are publicly accessible. Accordingly, all M1 clauses were met. With respect to surveillance, control, and enforcement (M2), competent authorities are responsible for monitoring compliance with fisheries legislation, and an effective system of sanctions is in place to address infringements. There is no evidence of widespread non-compliance or illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Therefore, all M2 clauses were met. Norway pout was classified as a Category A species, reflecting the availability of sufficient data to support annual stock assessments. ICES conducts yearly evaluations using an age-based analytical model within a Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) framework, applying established precautionary reference points (B_{lim} and B_{pa}) to assess spawning stock biomass. These assessments provide estimates of stock status relative to the reference points and deliver annual catch advice in the form of recommended removals. The underlying methods and analyses are peer-reviewed and publicly available. Fishing mortality is primarily managed through Total Allowable Catches (TACs),

and in recent years, total catches have remained below ICES advice. When the stock has fallen below the limit reference point, commercial fishing has been prohibited, as occurred in 2005, early 2006, throughout 2007, early 2011, and 2012. The most recent assessment, conducted in 2025, indicates that spawning stock biomass has fallen below both B_{pa} and B_{lim}. Consequently, ICES classifies the stock as lacking full reproductive capacity by the end of 2025. This status is driven by historically low recruitment during the 2023–2025 period, at levels comparable to those observed in 2003–2004. As a result, ICES has advised zero catch, with TACs set solely to account for unavoidable bycatch in other fisheries.

Blue whiting, saithe, herring, whiting, haddock, and horse mackerel from the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters were classified as Category C species. All stocks are assessed using age-based analytical models that integrate both catch and survey data for assessment and forecasting, and the most recent evaluations indicate that biomass levels are above the relevant limit reference points. The horse mackerel stock from the southern and central North Sea and the eastern English Channel (ICES Divisions 4.b, 4.c, and 7.d) was not included in this assessment, as the spatial overlap with the Norwegian EEZ is minimal to negligible, given that these areas lie largely south of Norway's maritime boundaries.

In the Productivity–Susceptibility Analysis (PSA) for Category D species, greater silver smelt received an average productivity score of 1.57 and an average susceptibility score of 2.75. Based on Table D3, these results indicate that the stock is not considered vulnerable to the Norway pout fishery.

The fishery has a low impact on ETP species. The only ETP species recorded in catches to date is spurdog, and measures are in place to minimize its mortality. Impacts on habitats are also considered low. Although the fishery may interact with the seabed, a range of regulations protects marine habitats from fishing activities. Norway pout is a benthopelagic species, typically occurring just above the seabed over deep mud habitats; therefore, the fishery does not require gear to scrape along the bottom, resulting in relatively low seabed contact. In addition, Norway and the European Union have implemented management measures to further minimize potential habitat impacts.

The Norway pout fishery operates within a well-characterized ecosystem, supported by comprehensive monitoring and management across the Greater North Sea. Existing technical, spatial, and regulatory measures indicate that the fishery is effectively controlled and unlikely to result in significant adverse impacts on marine ecosystems.

The Norway pout fishery in Subarea 4 and Division 3a (North Sea, Skagerrak, and Kattegat) is approved for use in Marine Trust certified products; however, as Norway pout is below B_{lim} this approval is conditional upon the targeted fishery remaining closed.

Summary of CB peer review	This report represents a thorough and detailed assessment of the fishery targeting Norway pout in the North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat. The assessor has used the most up to date information to justify their scoring. Initial PR feedback was taken on board by the

	assessor and changes made in the areas where the assessor agreed with that feedback; overall, the peer reviewer now agrees with all of the outcomes in the report, including the overall decision to Approve the fishery. However, it is important to note that Norway pout biomass is currently estimated to be below the LRP and therefore the MT approval is subject to the targeted fishery remaining closed.
Summary of external peer review (see Appendix 1 for the full peer review report)	*Note to assessor: Include a brief summary of the external peer review evaluation.*
Notes for on-site auditor	Please confirm that Norway pout is caught as bycatch in other fisheries, not from a fishery targeting this species.

Table 5: General results

Section	Outcome (Pass/Fail)
M1 - Management Framework	Pass
M2 - Surveillance, Control and Enforcement	Pass
E1 - Impacts on ETP Species	Pass
E2 - Impacts on Habitats	Pass
E3 - Ecosystem Impacts	Pass

Table 6: Species-specific results

See Table 7 for further details of species categorisation.

Category	Species name (common & Latin name)	Outcome (Pass/Fail/n/a)	
Category A	Norway pout (*Trisopterus esmarkii*)	A1	Pass
		A2	Pass
		A3	Pass
		A4	Pass
Category C	Blue whiting (*Micromesistius poutassou*)	Pass	
	Saithe (*Pollachius virens*)	Pass	
	Herring (*Clupea harengus*)	Pass	
	Whiting (*Merlangius merlangus*)	Pass	
	Haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*)	Pass	
	Horse mackerel *(Trachurus trachurus)*	Pass	
Category D	Greater silver smelt (*Argentina silus*)	Pass	

Table 7: Species categorisation table

List of all the species assessed. Type 1 species are assessed against Category A or Category B. Type 1 species must represent 95% of the total annual catch. Type 2 species are assessed against Category C

or Category D. Type 2 species may represent a maximum of 5% of the annual catch. Species that comprise less than 0.1% of the catch are not required to be assessed or listed here.

Species name (common & Latin name)	Stock	CITES listed yes/no	IUCN Red list Category	% catch composition	Management (Y/N)	Category (A, B, C or D)
Norway pout (*Trisopterus esmarkii*)	ICES Subarea 4 and Division 3a (North Sea, Skagerrak, and Kattegat)	No	Least Concern	81 - 95%	Yes	A
Blue whiting (*Micromesistius poutassou*)	ICES subareas 1–9, 12, and 14 (Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters)	No	Least Concern	<5%	Yes	C
Saithe (*Pollachius virens)*	subareas 4 and 6, and in Division 3.a (North Sea, Rockall and West of Scotland, Skagerrak and Kattegat)	No	Least Concern	<5%	Yes	C
Herring (*Clupea harengus*)	Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d, autumn spawners (North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat, eastern English Channel)	No	Least Concern	<5%	Yes	C
Herring (*Clupea harengus*)	ICES subareas 1, 2, and 5, and in divisions 4.a and 14.a, Norwegian spring-spawning herring (Northeast Atlantic and Arctic Ocean)	No	Least Concern	<5%	Yes	C
Whiting (*Merlangius*	Subarea 4 and Division 7.d	No	Least Concern	<5%	Yes	C

merlangus)	(North Sea and eastern English Channel)					
Haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*)	Subarea 4, Division 6.a, and Subdivision 20 (North Sea, West of Scotland, Skagerrak)	No	Least Concern	<1%	Yes	C
Horse mackerel (*Trachurus trachurus*)	ICES Subarea 8 and divisions 2.a, 3.a, 4.a, 5.b, 6.a, 7.a–c, and 7.e–k (Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters)	No	Least Concern	<5%	Yes	C
Greater silver smelt (*Argentina silus*)	ICES subareas 1, 2, and 4, and in Division 3.a (Northeast Arctic, North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat)	No	Least Concern	<5%	NO	D

Rationale

An updated catch composition data will be ideal, but the Norway pout fishery was closed in 2025 to promote the fishery recovery, and a TAC was allocated to be fished exclusively for bycatch. Therefore, this report maintains the species categorization and rationale as in the previous report.

The species considered in the Norway pout assessment include blue whiting, horse mackerel, greater silver smelt, haddock, saithe, herring, and whiting, consistent with the previous surveillance.

Historically, bycatch in the Norway pout fishery was dominated by haddock, whiting, cod, saithe, and herring (ICES 2025a), based on data originating from 2005 (Nielsen et al. 2016). Catch data from 2010–2014 show a similar composition, with blue whiting replacing saithe (MRAG 2023). More recent information from 2016–2018 (DNV 2022), 2020 (DNV 2021), and a 2021 gear-selectivity study (Grimaldo et al. 2023) indicates a shift in bycatch composition, with blue whiting, horse mackerel, greater silver smelt, saithe, and herring becoming dominant. Herring and whiting bycatch levels show notable interannual variability, exceeding 1% in some years but remaining below this level in others

Norway pout was excluded from the 2022 MSC recertification of the Norway sandeel and North Sea sprat fishery by Norway (DNV 2023), preventing an updated bycatch assessment through that

process. Nevertheless, ICES reports a general decline in overall bycatch levels (ICES 2025a).Thus, considering the most recent available data from 2016 – 2021 for this fishery, blue whiting, horse mackerel, greater silver smelt, saithe, herring, and whiting were included in this assessment, as they represent the most significant bycatch species, accounting for approximately 1–7% in average of the total catch in this 5-year period. Haddock was also included, as it was present in 2020 and 2021 and exhibits fluctuations above 1%. Cod and anglerfish were excluded from the assessment, as no catches have been recorded since 2010, and the average catch of cod in 2020 and 2021 is below 0.1% (Table 1).

	2016	2017	2018	2020	2021	Average
Norway pout	80.70%	82.60%	82.50%	84.79%	80.40%	82.20%
Blue whiting	8.20%	6.30%	4.10%	9.26%	8.60%	7.29%
Horse mackerel	3.10%	4.40%	1.30%	3.31%	2.20%	2.86%
Silver smelt	2.20%	1.60%	2.90%	-	-	1.34%
Saithe	2.00%	1.20%	0.70%	-	3.20%	1.42%
Herring	0.80%	1.50%	4.30%	-	1.50%	1.62%
Whiting	1.20%	0.80%	2.60%	0.34%	1.10%	1.21%
Haddock	-	-	-	0.15%	0.60%	0.15%
Cod	-	-	-	0.07%	0.20%	0.05%
Anglerfish	-	-	-	-	-	-
Others	1.8%	1.6%	1.6%	2.10%	2.20%	1.86%

Table 1: compilation of the most representative bycatch species data in the Norway pout fishery. Catch data from 2016–2018 represent the catch composition of the Norway pout fishery using bottom (small-mesh) trawl gear in the Northeast Atlantic (ICES Division 4 and Skagerrak, ICES Subdivision 3.a) by Norwegian vessels, where bycatch is reported to consist primarily of blue whiting and horse mackerel (DNV 2022). In contrast, the 2020 and 2021 data reflect catches from the Norway pout fishery by Norwegian vessels using both bottom and midwater trawls, which are aggregated and reported collectively as “trawls” (DNV 2021a, DNV 2021b).

For Denmark, the most recent draft MSC assessment for this fishery covers 2018–2022 data, and as in the Norwegian fishery, bycatch in the Norway pout fishery includes herring, haddock, whiting, and blue whiting (MRAG 2025).

Although detailed descriptive information on catch composition is limited, available sources consistently indicate that Norway pout constitutes the majority of the catch in the targeted fishery, accounting for approximately 81–95% of total catches. Norway pout is listed as Least Concern by the IUCN, is not included in any CITES appendix, and is subject to a specific management regime with established reference points and an annual TAC set by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES). Accordingly, Norway pout was classified as a Type 1 species and assessed under Category A. Bycatch levels have been relatively low in recent years and have declined following the implementation of management measures in the fishery (ICES 2025a); as a result, landing reports often combine Norway pout and bycatch in the total reported catch (ICES 2025b). Available data indicate that bycatch species account for less than 5% of total catches,

despite interannual variability. The most commonly recorded bycatch species during 2016–2021 (blue whiting, horse mackerel, greater silver smelt, haddock, saithe, herring, and whiting) were classified as Type 2 species; all species are listed as Least Concern by the IUCN, and none are included in any CITES appendix.

Blue whiting, saithe, herring, whiting, horse mackerel, and haddock were assessed as Category C species, as all are subject to species-specific management regimes with established reference points and annual TACs set by ICES. Despite blue withing exceeds the 5%, it was assessed as category C given that there is no available information about catch composition and as mentioned above, in the last Norway pout assessment is stated that bycatch levels have declined and therefor landings are often reported as combined catches of Norway pout and bycatch (ICES 2025a).Horse mackerel was previously assessed as Category D due to the lack of reference points, but following a 2024 benchmark assessment that split the stock into two units, reference points are now available for both stocks (ICES 2025c; ICES 2025d). Greater silver smelt was assessed as a Category D species, as no reference points expressed in absolute terms have been established for this stock (ICES 2024a).

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Management requirements

This section, or module, assesses the general management regime applied to the fishery under assessment. It comprises two parts, M1, which evaluates the management framework, and M2, which evaluates surveillance, control and enforcement within the fishery.

1.6. All management criteria must be met (pass) for a fishery to pass the Management requirements.

1.6.1. The sub-criteria offer a structured evidence base to demonstrate that the fishery sufficiently meets the management criteria. It is not expected that sub-criteria are assessed independently of the main criterion.

M1 Management framework

M1.1	**M1.1 There is an organisation responsible for managing the fishery.** *In reaching a determination for M1.1, the assessor should consider if the following is in place:*
	M1.1.1 The management and administration organisations within the fishery are clearly identified.
	M1.1.2 The functions and responsibilities of the management organisations include the overall regulation, administration, science and data collection and enforcement roles, and are documented and publicly available.
	M1.1.3 Fishers have access to information and/or training materials through nationally recognised organisations.
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

The management and administration organisations within the Norway pout fishery are clearly identified. The Norway pout distribution for this stock is in the northern North Sea and in Skagerrak at depths between 50 and 300 m, the fishery is nearly exclusively performed by Danish and Norwegian vessels using small mesh trawls in the northwestern North Sea (ICES 2025a), thus the fishery is managed by the European Commission (EC) and Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries (DOF) (Fish Source 2026).

The functions and responsibilities of the fisheries management organisations involved in the Norway pout fishery clearly encompass overall regulation, administration, scientific assessment, data collection, and enforcement, and these roles are well documented and publicly available. At the EU level, the EC, through the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013, establishes binding rules and objectives to ensure that fishing activities are environmentally sustainable, economically viable, and socially responsible, including the setting of catch and effort limits (EC 2026a). In Norway, the Directorate of Fisheries (DOF) acts as both an advisory and executive body to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries, contributing to policy development

while administering fisheries management and control (DOF 2026a). Norway operates a comprehensive Electronic Reporting System, requiring most commercial vessels to submit real-time catch and activity data, which supports monitoring, control, and enforcement by the Directorate of Fisheries and the Norwegian Coast Guard, while also providing scientific input to the Institute of Marine Research (IMR), the country's principal marine science advisory body (DOF 2026b, IMR 2026). At the EU level, a harmonised data collection framework obliges Member States to collect and manage biological, environmental, economic, and social fisheries data to support scientific advice, with public rules governing data quality, storage, and accessibility (EC 2026b). Cooperation between Norway and the EU is further strengthened through a bilateral data-exchange agreement that underpins shared control and enforcement in each other's waters (DOF 2026b). By a joint request of the EU and Norway, The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), trough the Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK) assess each year the Norway pout, providing advice on fishing opportunities, catch, and effort, including each year Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and an overview of the stock development over time (ICES 2025a). Together, these interconnected regulatory, scientific, data, and enforcement systems demonstrate that management responsibilities are clearly defined, operational, and publicly accessible.

In the Norwegian commercial fisheries, fishers have access to information and training-type resources through nationally recognised organisations, though the specifics and scope vary depending on the type of training and the organisation involved:

- The Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries provides official information on fishing rules, reporting systems, statistics, and monitoring requirements, which are publicly available. This information supports fishers in understanding their obligations under Norwegian fisheries law and management systems (DOF 2026c).
- The Norwegian Institute of Marine Research produces scientific advice on stocks (including Norway pout) and broader ecosystem knowledge that feeds into management decisions. Fishers and industry stakeholders can access reports and information from such institutes to better understand stock status and science-based management (IMR 2026).
- The Norwegian Maritime Authority (NMA) oversees a comprehensive framework for maritime training, education, and certification. It is responsible for issuing the personal maritime certificates required for seafarers and fishing vessel personnel, including certificates of competency and proficiency under the STCW Convention (Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers). While the NMA does not deliver training directly, it approves training providers and courses that meet STCW and national requirements, with recognised training centres responsible for delivering the instruction. The Authority also provides guidance to schools and training institutions, publishes clear information on qualification requirements and approved curricula, and ensures that maritime education (such as navigation and engineering programmes offered by recognised academies) complies with international standards. Completion of approved training is reported through authorised digital systems, enabling the NMA to maintain oversight of compliance and certification (NMA 2026).

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M1.2	**M1.2 Fishery management organisations are legally empowered to take management actions.** *In reaching a determination for M1.2, the assessor should consider if the following is in place:*	
	M1.2.1	There are legal instruments in place to give authority to the management organisation(s) which can include policies, regulations, acts or other legal mechanisms.
	M1.2.2	Vessels wishing to participate in the fishery must be authorised by the management organisation(s).
	M1.2.3	The management system has a mechanism in place for the resolution of legal disputes.

	M1.2.4 There is evidence of the legal rights of people dependent on fishing for food or livelihood.
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

Effective legal instruments are in place to confer authority to the relevant fisheries management organisations. In Norway, the DOF operates under the Marine Resources Act (DOF 2026a, MRA 2008), which applies to all harvesting and utilisation of wild living marine resources. The Act mandates the Ministry to implement management measures to ensure sustainable use and explicitly authorises the setting of national catch limits. Chapter 3 ("Catch quantities and quotas") allows the Ministry to establish time-bound national quotas expressed in terms of weight, volume, number of individuals, fishing days, or equivalent measures. The sum of all allocated quotas may not exceed the national quota, ensuring enforceable control of total removals (MRA 2008). At the EU level, the CFP provides the binding legal framework for sustainable fisheries management, including catch limits, multiannual plans, technical measures, fleet capacity controls, IUU fishing prevention, and enforcement. The EU Marine Action Plan further strengthens the CFP by requiring Member States to implement fisheries conservation measures, including effective management of marine protected areas, in line with defined timelines (EC 2023a, EC 2026).

Vessels wishing to participate in the Norway pout fishery are authorised by the relevant EU Member State authorities in accordance with the CFP control and licensing provisions, rather than by an EU management organisation itself (EU 2026). In Norway, vessels must be authorised by the DOF (DOF 2026b) under the Marine Resources Act (MRA 2008). Access is therefore controlled through a combination of vessel authorisation, quota allocation, and compliance with national management measures, ensuring that only authorised vessels may participate in the fishery.

The management system provides formal mechanisms for resolving legal disputes related to fisheries activities. In Norway, decisions by the DOF under the Marine Resources Act may be appealed administratively and are subject to judicial review by the ordinary courts (NEPP 2023; PAA 2022). At the EU level, CFP decisions can be challenged before the Court of Justice of the European Union, and national courts may refer questions on CFP interpretation or validity under Article 267 TFEU, ensuring structured and consistent judicial oversight (EP 2026).

There is evidence of legal recognition of the rights and interests of people dependent on fishing for food and livelihoods for the Norway pout fishery in both Norway and the EU. In Norway, the Marine Resources Act requires fisheries to be managed to promote sustainable use, employment, and coastal community livelihoods (MRA 2008), while in the European Union the CFP mandates that fisheries management deliver economic, social, and employment benefits and contribute to food supply, with access regulated using transparent and objective social criteria (EU 2023).

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M1.3	**M1.3**	**There is an organisation responsible for collecting data and (scientifically) assessing the fishery.** *In reaching a determination for M1.3, the assessor should consider if the following is in place:*
	M1.3.1	The organisation(s) responsible for collecting data and assessing the fishery is/are clearly identified.
	M1.3.2	The management system receives scientific advice regarding stock, non-target species and ecosystem status.
	M1.3.3	Scientific advice is independent from the management organisation(s) and transparent in its formulation through a clearly defined process.
Clause outcome	*Pass*	

Rationale

For the Norway pout fishery, the responsible organisations for data collection and assessment are clearly identified: The EU's data collection framework outlines the EU countries' obligations to collect, manage, and make available a wide range of fisheries and aquaculture data needed for scientific advice. This includes biological, environmental, economic, and social data. Member States' data collection activities are financially supported by the EU. Data collection needs to ensure accuracy, reliability, timeliness, safe storage, and improved data availability (EC 2026a).
In Norway, the DOF operates electronic reporting systems for fishing activity and catch data from vessels, stores this information, and shares it with authorised bodies, such as the Institute of Marine Research (IMR), the country's main marine science institution and adviser on stock status and fisheries science. (MRA 2008, DOF 2026b).

The fisheries management systems receive scientific advice on Norway pout stock status, impacts on non-target species, and broader ecosystem conditions. In Norway, the IMR provides regular stock assessments and ecosystem analyses to inform decisions by the DOF (IMR 2026); at the EU level, scientific advice for Norway pout and associated species is provided through the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF), which evaluate stock status, bycatch and ecosystem indicators under the Common Fisheries Policy. (ICES 2026, EC 2026b).

The IMR operates under scientific governance structures (including independent review and oversight) to minimise political influence, and its research contributes to international advisory processes, such as those led by ICES. The independence of IMR's scientific work is recognised through its research governance and peer-review outputs.

ICES is an intergovernmental scientific body that produces stock assessments and ecosystem advice based on standardized methods and expert review. Its processes are designed to be evidence-based, scientifically rigorous, and independent of management authorities; advice is published in open reports that are publicly accessible (ICES 2023). STECF, composed of external scientific experts appointed for fixed terms, reviews ICES outputs and provides additional scientific and technical advice to the European Commission on CFP implementation; members are expected to act independently in the public interest (EC 20206c). Together, these bodies ensure that scientific advice used in Norway and EU fisheries management is independent of the authorities that set quotas or regulations, and formulated through documented, transparent processes with expert peer review and published outcomes providing a clear institutional separation between science and policy decision-making.

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M1.4	**M1.4 The fishery management system is based on the principles of sustainable fishing and a precautionary approach.** *In reaching a determination for M1.4, the assessor should consider if the following is in place:* M1.4.1 A policy or long-term management objective for sustainable harvesting based on the best scientific evidence and a precautionary approach is publicly available and implemented for the fishery.
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

A publicly available policy and long-term management objective for sustainable harvesting, based on the best available scientific evidence and the precautionary approach, is in place and implemented for the Norway pout fishery.

In Norway, fisheries management is governed by the Marine Resources Act, which establishes sustainability, ecosystem-based management, and the precautionary approach as core legal principles. The Act requires that harvesting of wild living marine resources be based on scientific advice and managed to ensure long-term conservation while maintaining the resource base for future generations. Management measures, including catch limits for Norway pout, are set by the Ministry based on scientific advice primarily provided by the Institute of Marine Research (IMR) and international scientific bodies such as ICES, ensuring that decisions reflect the best available evidence and precaution where uncertainty exists (MRA 2008).

At the European Union level, the CFP (Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013) provides a clear long-term management objective to ensure that fishing activities are environmentally sustainable in the long term. Article 2 of the CFP explicitly requires the application of the precautionary approach to fisheries management and mandates that stocks be restored and maintained above levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield (MSY). Scientific advice underpinning these objectives is provided through ICES and reviewed by the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF), and is published transparently. These objectives apply to Norway pout stocks managed cooperatively by Norway and the EU, ensuring alignment between policy commitments and operational management measures.

Together, these frameworks demonstrate that the Norway pout fishery is managed under clearly articulated, publicly accessible policies that embed long-term sustainability objectives, rely on independent scientific advice, and apply the precautionary approach.

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M1.5	**M1.5 There is a clearly defined decision-making process which is transparent, with processes and results made publicly available.** *In reaching a determination for M1.5, the assessor should consider if the following is in place:*	
	M1.5.1 There is participatory engagement through which fishery stakeholders and other stakeholders can access, provide information, consult with, and respond to, the management systems' decision-making process.	
	M1.5.2 The decision-making process is transparent, with results made publicly available.	
	M1.5.3 The fishery management system is subject to periodic internal or external review to validate the decision-making process, outcomes and scientific data.	
Outcome	*Pass*	

Rationale

Norway's Marine Resources Act (MRA 2008) established an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries

Management (EAFM), setting clear management objectives and tools to prioritise fisheries measures, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity considerations, and ensure regular stakeholder involvement (Gullestad et al. 2017). The Act provides a formal legal basis for participation through the Council for Regulatory Advice (Section 8), which includes representatives of stakeholder organisations. Stakeholder engagement is further implemented through the Annual Regulatory Meeting (Regulatory Board), where fishermen's organisations, industry, trade unions, the Sami Parliament, local authorities, environmental NGOs, and other stakeholders contribute to fisheries management decisions (Figure 1). This participatory regulatory cycle has been in place since the 1970s and was strengthened under the MRA to explicitly address ecosystem considerations.

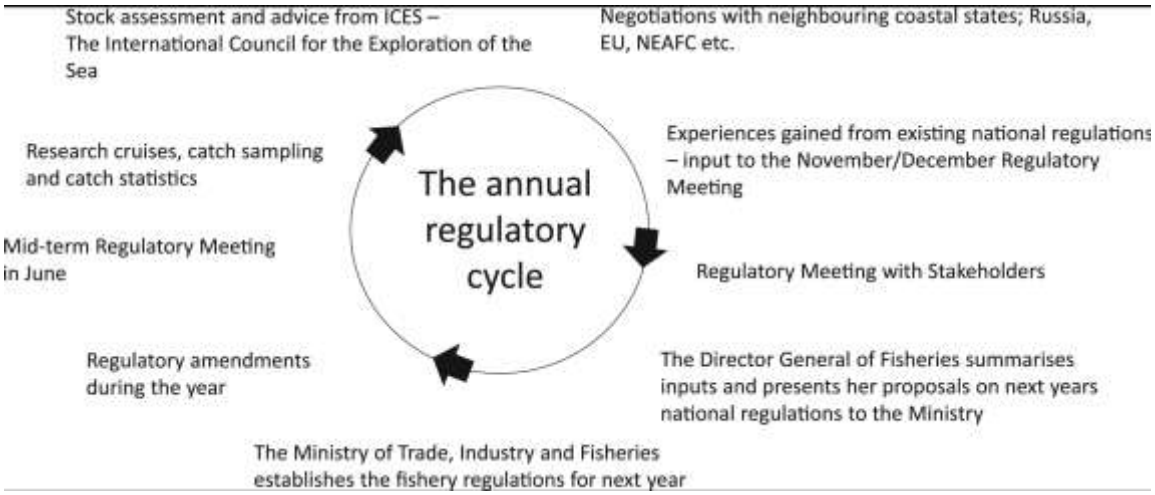

Figure 1. The annual regulatory cycle that occurs in November, where stakeholders get involved in management decisions (Gullestad et al. 2017).

At the EU level, the 2013 reform of the CFP introduced regionalisation, enabling Member States with a management interest to jointly develop fisheries management measures (such as multiannual plans, discard plans, stock recovery measures, conservation measures linked to EU environmental legislation, and technical measures) which are adopted by the European Commission through delegated or implementing acts (EC 2026a). The CFP requires multiannual plans to be developed in consultation with Advisory Councils, industry operators, scientists, and other stakeholders, ensuring structured stakeholder participation. This participatory framework was further reinforced in June 2024, when the European Commission launched a public consultation as part of a comprehensive evaluation of the CFP's effectiveness since 2013 (EC 2024).

The UK / EU / Norway trilateral fishing agreements are publicly available and negotiations are transparent in meeting records. The 2024 trilateral agreement includes the terms of reference for a Working Group on the distribution of Norway pout in Subarea 4 (North Sea) and Division 3.a (Skagerrak and Kattegat) and adjacent waters, with the objective of collect and collate information on the entire geographical distribution of all life stages of Norway pout, based on internationally recognised data collection methods and on the distribution of catches from this stock (TFA 2023).

ICES stock assessments and annual Total allowable catches (TACs) for the Norway pout can be found

on their website (https://ices-library.figshare.com/). Reports include historical data, descriptions of analysis methods, specific criteria, and are used rationally to set the TAC.

Information about Norwegian fisheries and aquaculture management is made public on the Norwegian government website (https://www.regjeringen.no/en/id4/), while information regarding the EU fisheries can be found in the Oceans and fisheries sections of the European Commission webpage (https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/fisheries_en).

he Norway pout fishery management system is subject to regular internal and external review, as scientific advice produced by the Institute of Marine Research is quality-assured and independently peer-reviewed through ICES, while management measures under the Common Fisheries Policy are further reviewed through STECF and periodic European Commission evaluations, ensuring validation of decision-making processes, outcomes, and scientific data (IMR 2026, ICES 2023, EC 2026b)

These demonstrate that the Norway pout fishery management system supports inclusive participation, transparent decision-making, and regular internal and external review of science and management performance

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M2 Surveillance, control and enforcement

M2.1	**M2.1**	**There is an organisation responsible for monitoring compliance with fishery laws and regulations.** *In reaching a determination for M2.1, the assessor should consider if the following is in place:*
	M2.1.1	There is an organisation responsible for monitoring compliance with specific monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) mechanisms in place.
	M2.1.2	There are relevant tools or mechanisms used to minimise IUU fishing activity.
	M2.1.3	There is evidence of monitoring and surveillance activity appropriate to the intensity, geography, management control measures and compliance behaviour of the fishery.
Outcome	*Pass*	

Rationale

Monitoring and enforcement of fisheries compliance in the EU is primarily the responsibility of the individual member states, coordinated at EU level by the European Commission and supported by the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) to oversee compliance with TACs, technical measures, and reporting obligations for fishing vessels (EC 2026a, EFCA 2026a). In Norway, the Marine Resources Act places the overall responsibility for monitoring, control and surveillance (MRA 2008); thus The DOF is the primary authority responsible for fisheries control and compliance, working in close cooperation with the Norwegian Coast Guard, which conducts inspections at sea and enforces regulations. Compliance is supported through mandatory electronic reporting systems, vessel monitoring systems, and data-sharing arrangements that allow authorities to track fishing activity, catches, and effort in real time (DOF 2026a, NCG 2026).

he European Union addresses illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing through the IUU Regulation, which has been in force since 1 January 2010 and aims to prevent EU operators and markets from benefiting from IUU fishing (EU 2024). The Regulation requires that all marine fishery products imported into the EU are accompanied by catch certificates validated by the competent flag State, and it applies to EU operators worldwide, regardless of flag. The European Commission works with Member States and stakeholders to ensure coherent implementation, maintains and regularly updates an EU IUU vessel list based on information from regional fisheries management organisations, and can take enforcement action against non-cooperating countries through a yellow- and red-card system, including trade restrictions. To strengthen controls and traceability, the EU has introduced CATCH, an electronic system for the verification of catch certificates, which will become mandatory for EU operators and authorities for imports of fishery products from January 2026 following the latest revision of the IUU Regulation (EC 2026b). In Norway, Chapter 8 of the Norwegian Marine Resources Act, which addresses measures against illegal, unreported and

unregulated (IUU) fishing, prohibits the landing of catches of wild living marine resources taken by non-Norwegian vessels or by vessels not commanded by a Norwegian national or a person assimilated to a Norwegian national, thereby strengthening controls against IUU fishing (MRA 2008). Also, the DOF has established an IUU list under regulations concerning the ban on landing fish and other special measures against IUU fishing (DOF 2026b). Also, Norway ranks as a low-risk country for illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing according to the IUU Fishing Risk Index, reflecting its strong governance framework, effective monitoring, control and surveillance systems, and high levels of transparency and enforcement (IUU 2026).

At the EU level, the CFP and the EU IUU Regulation require traceability of catches, landing declarations, and control throughout the supply chain, supported by coordinated inspections and control programmes facilitated by the EFCA (EC 2026a, EC 2026b, EFCA 2026a). In addition, bilateral data-exchange agreements between Norway and the EU strengthen control and enforcement when vessels operate in each other's waters (DOF 2026a). In Norway the DOF conducts inspections of fishing activities at sea and carries out physical inspections of landings. When catches are landed, landing data are systematically verified against the fishing rights and quotas allocated to each vessel, a process undertaken jointly by the fish sales organisations and the DOF. Norwegian vessels are required to use electronic catch logbooks through the Electronic Reporting System (ERS), which enables real-time reporting of fishing activity and catches. Norway has also established agreements with several countries, including the EU, for the exchange of ERS data, strengthening cross-border monitoring and control. The DOF In cooperation with the Norwegian Coast Guard, uses these tools alongside risk-based inspections, cross-checking of landing data, and quota monitoring to detect and deter non-compliance (DOF 2026a). All these activities demonstrates that the monitoring and surveillance activities are appropriate to the intensity, geography, management control measures and compliance behaviour of the fishery.

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M2.2	**M2.2 There is a framework of sanctions which are applied when infringements against laws and regulations are discovered.** *In reaching a determination for M2.2, the assessor should consider if the following is in place:*	
	M2.2.1 The laws and regulations provide for penalties or sanctions that are adequate in severity to act as an effective deterrent.	
	M2.2.2 There is no evidence of systematic non-compliance.	
Outcome	*Pass*	

Rationale

In the European Union, detected infringements of Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) rules must be sanctioned by national authorities. While Member States maintain their own sanctioning systems, EU law requires sanctions to be effective, proportionate, and dissuasive, taking into account the seriousness of the offence, economic benefit gained, and environmental impact. A mandatory points system applies to serious infringements by vessel masters and licence holders, with licence suspensions of up to 12 months when thresholds are exceeded within a three-year period (EC 2026a). The European Commission oversees enforcement through audits and investigations, while Member States report infringements under periodic control legislation reporting and, from 2026, through annual national inspection and control reports (EC 2026b).

he Norwegian Marine Resources Act establishes a comprehensive sanctioning framework under Chapters 11 and 12, allowing authorities to impose coercive fines, infringement fines, and criminal penalties to ensure compliance with fisheries regulations. Coercive fines may be applied on a continuing basis until corrective actions are taken, while infringement fines are set either as fixed penalties or case-specific amounts, taking into account the seriousness of the offence, economic benefit gained, and enforcement costs. The Act also allows for the confiscation of catch, fishing gear, vessels, and other assets. Additional legal authority for sanctions is provided through the Act on First-Hand Sales of Wild Catch and the Coast Guard Act, including provisions for penal liability and imprisonment in serious cases. Norwegian enforcement authorities apply a graduated sanctioning system, ranging from warnings and administrative fines to formal prosecution, ensuring sanctions are proportionate, effective, and dissuasive (MRA 2008).

These frameworks demonstrate that sanctions are designed to deter non-compliance and support effective fisheries management.

The fishery total landings have been well below TACs in recent years (ICES 2025a), such that there is no incentive for TAC-related offenses such as underreporting. No illegal landings or other infringements have been reported in this fishery.

References

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M2.3	**M2.3 There is substantial evidence of widespread compliance in the fishery, and no substantial evidence of IUU fishing.** *In reaching a determination for M2.3, the assessor should consider if the following is in place:*	
	M2.3.1	The level of compliance is documented and updated routinely, statistically reviewed and available.
	M2.3.2	Fishers provide additional information and cooperate with management/enforcement agencies/organisations to support the effective management of the fishery.
	M2.3.3	The catch recording and reporting system is sufficient for effective traceability of catches per vessel and supports the prevention of IUU fishing.
Outcome	*Pass*	

Rationale

At the EU level, compliance data are collected through Electronic Reporting Systems (ERS), VMS, inspections, and traceability systems, with information stored in national databases and exchanged via the UN/FLUX standard, enabling routine cross-checking and statistical analysis to detect non-compliance (EC 2026a). In Norway, compliance is systematically documented and updated through mandatory electronic catch and activity reporting, VMS position reports, inspections, and follow-up conducted by the Directorate of Fisheries. The Fisheries Monitoring Centre (FMC) operates 24/7

to receive, process, and analyse tracking data and electronic reports from Norwegian and foreign vessels, enabling continuous monitoring and statistical review of fishing activity and compliance trends (MRA 2008, DOF 2026a, DOF 2026b).

Fishers provide additional information and cooperate with management/enforcement agencies/organisations to support the effective management of the fishery. In the EU, fishers are required to submit accurate electronic logbooks, position reports, and landing data, and to cooperate with inspections at sea and in port (EC 2026a). The increasing use of digital tools, including ERS, VMS, and the future mandatory Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) systems, further strengthens fisher cooperation and transparency.
In Norway, under the Norwegian Marine Resources Act, fishers are legally required to fully cooperate with inspections, including answering communications, allowing inspectors and observers on board, providing access to products and documentation, and facilitating sampling and investigations (MRA 2008, DOF2026b).

The catch recording and reporting framework in the EU and Norway integrates vessel identification, spatial tracking, and electronic catch documentation into a single control chain that allows catches to be traced from harvest to landing and first sale at the vessel level. These systems enable authorities to reconcile reported catches with vessel movements, inspection findings, and landing data, supporting effective verification and risk-based control. The interoperability of national systems and international data exchange mechanisms further reduces opportunities for misreporting and strengthens the prevention and detection of IUU fishing.

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Species requirements

This section, or module, comprises of four species categories. Each species in the catch is subject to an assessment against the relevant species category in this section (see clauses 1.2 and 1.3 and Table 6).

Type 1 species can be considered the ‘target’ or ‘main’ species in the fishery under assessment. They make up the bulk of the catch and a subjected to a detailed assessment. Type 1 species must represent 95% of the total annual catch. If a species-specific management regime is in place for a Type 1 species,

it shall be assessed under Category A. If there is no species-specific management regime in place for a Type 1 species, it shall be assessed under Category B.

Type 2 Species can be considered the 'non-target' species in the fishery under assessment. They comprise a small proportion of the annual catch and are subjected to a relatively high-level assessment. Type 2 species may represent a maximum of 5% of the annual catch. If a species-specific management regime is in place for a Type 2 species, it shall be assessed under Category C. If there is no species-specific management regime in place for a Type 2 species, it shall be assessed under Category D.

Species that comprise less than 0.1% of the catch are not required to be assessed or listed here.

Category A species

2.1. All clauses must be met for a species to pass the Category A assessment.

2.1.1. If a species fails any of the Category A clauses, it should be re-assessed as a Category B species.

NORWAY POUT (*Trisopterus esmarkii*)

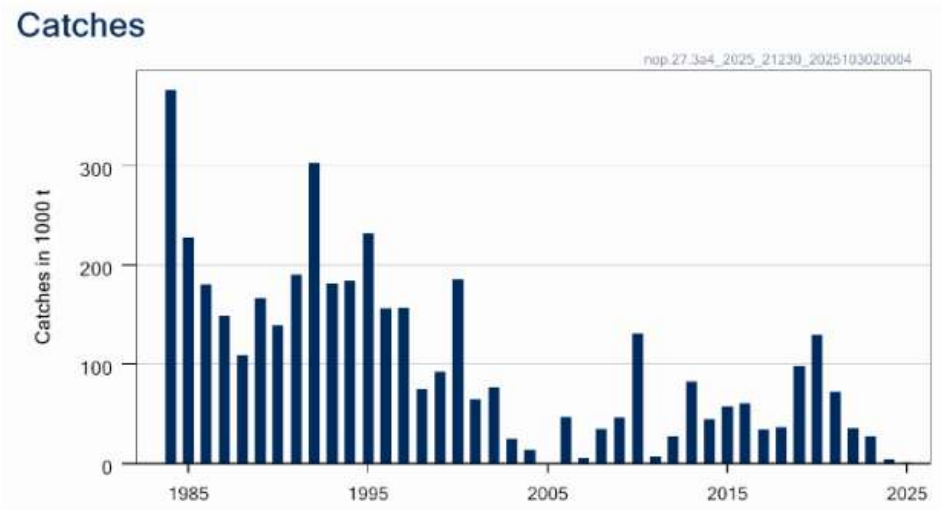
A1 Data collection

A1.1	**A1.1 Landings data are collected such that the fishery-wide removals of this species are known.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

In Norway, a landing obligation is in place, and all catches are recorded in logbooks and transmitted to research and management institutions for assessment and management purposes (MRA 2008). Within the EU, fisheries data collection is governed by the Data Collection Framework (DCF), which sets out Member States' obligations to collect, manage, and make available fisheries and aquaculture data required for scientific advice. In addition, from 2028 onwards, all fishing vessels, regardless of size, will be required to use Electronic Reporting Systems (ERS), enabling vessel masters and national authorities to record, report, process, store, and transmit data on catches, landings, sales, and transhipments (EC 2026).

At the joint request of the EU and Norway, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), through the Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK), conducts annual assessments of the Norway pout stock (ICES 2025a). To support this work, ICES has compiled long-term landing data by country for Subarea 4 and Division 3.a, based on submissions from WGNSSK members, with records available from 1961 to the present (ICES 2025a).



Norway pout catches in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a from 1984 to 2024. Catches in 2024 (shaded in a lighter colour) are up to mid-September. (ICES 2025b).

References

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A1.2	**A1.2 Sufficient additional information is collected to enable an indication of stock status to be estimated.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

ICES, through the Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK), conducts annual assessments of the Norway pout stock, providing advice on fishing opportunities, catches, and effort, including annual Total Allowable Catches (TACs) and an overview of stock trends over time (ICES 2025a; ICES 2025b). To support these assessments, ICES uses a comprehensive dataset that includes landings, age composition of catches, weight-at-age, maturity, and natural mortality, as well as commercial fisheries data and fishery-independent survey data from research vessels (ICES 2025a). This information, submitted by WGNSSK members,

is considered sufficient to estimate stock status.
References ICES (2025a). Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.29085995.v4 ICES (2025b). Norway pout (Trisopterus esmarkii) in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a (North Sea, Skagerrak, and Kattegat). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202770.v1

A2 Stock assessment

A2.1	**A2.1** **A stock assessment is conducted at least once every 3 years (or every 5 years if there is substantial supporting information that this is sufficient for the long-term sustainable management of the stock) and considers all fishery removals and the biological characteristics of the species.**
Outcome	*Pass*
Rationale Each year, ICES, through the WGNSSK, assesses Norway pout using an age-based analytical model (quarterly SAM/SESAM). As a short-lived species with highly variable recruitment, the stock is managed using an MSY-based escapement strategy supported by stochastic projections (ICES 2025a). The assessment draws on commercial catch data from the main Danish and Norwegian fisheries and four fishery-independent survey indices, together with survey-based maturity estimates, natural mortality derived from IBTS indices, and long-term estimates of mean weight-at-age; also catches as by catch in other fisheries are included (ICES 2025a; ICES 2025b).	
References ICES (2025a). Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.29085995.v4 ICES (2025b). Norway pout (Trisopterus esmarkii) in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a (North Sea, Skagerrak, and Kattegat). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202770.v1	

A2.2	**A2.2** **The assessment provides an estimate of the status of the biological stock relative to a reference point or proxy.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

The assessment estimates the status of the Norway pout stock by evaluating spawning-stock biomass relative to established ICES reference points within an escapement-based management framework for short-lived species. Stock status is assessed against a limit biomass reference point (B_{lim}), defined as the lowest observed quarterly spawning-stock biomass (B_{loss}) in quarter 4, with management advice designed to ensure that the probability of SSB falling below B_{lim} by 1 October in the forecast year remains below 5%. This approach, supported by stochastic projections and validated through management strategy evaluations, allows ICES to determine whether the stock remains within precautionary limits and to provide scientifically robust advice on sustainable fishing opportunities (ICES 2025a).

Framework	Reference point	Value	Technical basis	Source
Maximum sustainable yield (MSY) approach	MSY $B_{escapement}$	Not defined	It has not been defined, as the escapement strategy uses directly the 95% probability of SSB being above B_{lim}	
	F_{MSY}	Not defined		
	F_{cap}	0.70	A long-term management strategy evaluation, indicating that an escapement strategy for Norway pout is only precautionary with the addition of an upper limit on fishing mortality = F_{cap} ($F_{bar[1-2]}$) at 0.7	Brooks and Nielsen (2020)
Precautionary approach	B_{lim}	42 573 tonnes (4th quarter)	$B_{lim} = B_{loss}$, the lowest observed biomass in 2005 (as estimated in the updated benchmark assessment)	Brooks and Nielsen (2020)
	B_{PA}	69 736 tonnes (4th quarter)	$B_{PA} = B_{lim} e^{0.3 \times 1.645}$	Brooks and Nielsen (2020)
	F_{PA}	Not defined		
Management plan	SSB_{mgt}	Not applicable		
	F_{mgt}	Not applicable		

Norway pout in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a. Reference points, values, and their technical basis (ICES 2025b).

References

ICES (2025a). Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.29085995.v4

ICES (2025b). Norway pout (Trisopterus esmarkii) in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a (North Sea, Skagerrak, and Kattegat). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202770.v1

A2.3	**A2.3 The assessment provides an indication of the volume of fishery removals which is appropriate for the current stock status.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

Norway pout is a short-lived species with highly variable recruitment that strongly influences both

spawning-stock biomass and total biomass. Accordingly, ICES applies an MSY-based management approach for short-lived species in the form of an escapement strategy supported by stochastic forecasts, designed to ensure, with 95% probability, that spawning-stock biomass (SSB) remains above B_{lim} after fishing has taken place. The latest advice, published in October 2025, indicates that when the MSY approach and precautionary considerations are applied, there should be zero catches from 01 November 2025 to 31 October 2026. For implementation of the escapement strategy, SSB is estimated at the beginning of quarter 4 as a proxy for SSB at spawning time (quarter 1). While the catch forecast is produced for the period 1 October to 30 September, ICES considers this to be a sufficient approximation of the TAC year and suitable for direct application in management for the period 1 November 2025 to 31 October 2026 (ICES 2025a; ICES 2025b).

References

ICES (2025a). Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.29085995.v4

ICES (2025b). Norway pout (Trisopterus esmarkii) in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a (North Sea, Skagerrak, and Kattegat). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202770.v1

A2.4	**A2.4 The assessment is subject to internal or external peer review.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

The ICES WGNSSK assesses the main demersal stocks in the North Sea, Skagerrak, and eastern English Channel. The group comprises 66 members from nine countries and includes both experienced and early-career scientists (WGNSSK 2025). Norway pout is assessed annually, with the most recent assessment conducted through online meetings in September 2025 involving scientists from fisheries research institutes and universities across the region (ICES 2025a).

The assessment results were presented, reviewed, and agreed upon by the working group before being forwarded to the ICES Advice Drafting Group, composed of national experts, for further review. The advice was then reviewed and adopted by the ICES Advisory Committee (ACOM), which delivers ICES advice in accordance with ten principles supporting ecosystem-based management. These principles ensure that the advice is based on the best available science and data, is credible and legitimate to authorities and stakeholders, and is relevant and operational for management decision-making. In line with ACOM Principle 7, the assessment process undergoes peer review to ensure scientific robustness and credibility. All analyses and methods are reviewed by at least two independent reviewers, either through periodic benchmark assessments for recurring advice or through one-off reviews for specific requests (ICES 2023).

ICES advice principles, Principle 7 states that the process undergo through a peer review phase. (ICES 2023).

References

ICES (2025a). Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.29085995.v4

ICES (2023). Guide to ICES advisory framework and principles. General ICES Advice guidelines. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.22116890.v1

A2.5	**A2.5 The assessment is made publicly available.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

All the stock Assessments and advice for this stock are publicly available on the ICES (latest advice) website (https://www.ices.dk/advice/Pages/Latest-Advice.aspx) and the ICES WGNSSK website (https://www.ices.dk/community/groups/Pages/WGNSSK.aspx).

References
NA

A3 Harvest strategy

A3.1	**A3.1 There is a mechanism in place by which total fishing mortality of this species is restricted.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

Total fishing mortality for Norway pout is restricted through an annual management mechanism

combining ICES scientific advice and EU–Norway bilateral negotiations. ICES provides MSY-based escapement advice designed to keep spawning-stock biomass above B_{lim}, including an upper cap on fishing mortality where relevant. This advice forms the scientific basis for annual bilateral negotiations between the EU and Norway, during which the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) is agreed and implemented through EU legislation and Norwegian national management. In years where ICES advises zero catch due to elevated risk to stock status, as reflected in recent advice, managers have adopted corresponding zero or bycatch-only TACs, effectively constraining fishing activity and limiting total fishing mortality in line with precautionary and MSY principles (ICES 2025a, ICES 2025b).

References

ICES (2025a). Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.29085995.v4

ICES (2025b). Norway pout (Trisopterus esmarkii) in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a (North Sea, Skagerrak, and Kattegat). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202770.v1

A3.2	**A3.2 Total fishery removals of this species do not regularly exceed the level indicated or stated in the stock assessment. Where a specific quantity of removals is recommended, the actual removals may exceed this by up to 10% ONLY if the stock status is above the limit reference point or proxy.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

In recent years, both the TAC and realized catches for Norway pout have remained below ICES advice (ICES 2025a). Quota uptake was below 75% in 2019, below 80% in 2020, below 35% in 2021–2022, below 25% in 2023, and below 20% in 2024. This reduces exploitation and helps to keep the spawning-stock biomass. Considering that 2024 and 2025 ICES advice was of zero catch, management authorities agree a TAC, which may only be fished exclusively for by-catches (ICES 2025b).

The persistent under-utilisation of the TAC is likely driven by the prioritisation of more economically valuable target species and by bycatch constraints, particularly those related to herring and whiting (ICES 2025a). Overall, TACs have been set within the ranges recommended by ICES, and reported catches have remained within these limits in recent years.

Year	ICES advice	Predicted catch corresponding to advice^^	TAC Norway	TAC EU^	TAC UK^	Official catch (including bycatch of other species)	ICES catch
2020	MSY approach (escapement strategy; probability of SSB falling below B_{lim} is less than 5%) with F_{cap} = 0.7	≤ 167105	98053	72500		131300	129497
2021	MSY approach (escapement strategy; probability of SSB falling below B_{lim} is less than 5%) with F_{cap} = 0.7	≤ 254038	127019	116555	11745	72486	71954
2022	MSY approach (escapement strategy; probability of SSB falling below B_{lim} is less than 5%)	≤ 118273	59137	49524	10204	35954	35724
2023	MSY approach (escapement strategy; probability of SSB falling below B_{lim} is less than 5%)	≤ 116823	58411	46973	11439	27378	27356
2024	MSY approach (escapement strategy; probability of SSB falling below B_{lim} is less than 5%)	≤ 20583	10292	8234	2058	3946^^^	3899
2025	MSY approach: zero catch	0	2500***	300***	100***		
2026	MSY approach: zero catch	0					

Norway pout in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a. History of ICES advice, agreed TACs, official catch, and ICES catch estimate from 2010-2024. Weights are in tonnes (ICES 2025b).

References

ICES (2025a). Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.29085995.v4

ICES (2025b). Norway pout (Trisopterus esmarkii) in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a (North Sea, Skagerrak, and Kattegat). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202770.v1

A3.3	**A3.3 Commercial fishery removals are prohibited when the stock has been estimated to be below the limit reference point or proxy (small quotas for research or non-target catch of the species in other fisheries are permissible).**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

In previous years, the advice was produced in relation to a precautionary TAC, which was set to 198,000 t in the EC zone and 50,000 t in the Norwegian zone. On the basis of the real-time management advice from ICES, the EU and Norway agreed to close the directed Norway pout fishery in 2005, the first part of 2006, all of 2007, and in the first part of 2011 and 2012. In 2005 and 2007, the TAC was 0 in the EC zone and 5000 t in the Norwegian zone, the latter to allow for bycatches of Norway pout in the directed Norwegian blue whiting fishery (ICES 2025a). Also, the previous and current advice is zero catch, which demonstrates that, historically and to date, commercial fishery removals are prohibited when the stock has been estimated to be below the

limit reference point, or when it is in danger of being below the limit reference point (ICES 2025a, ICES 2025b).

References

ICES (2025a). Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.29085995.v4

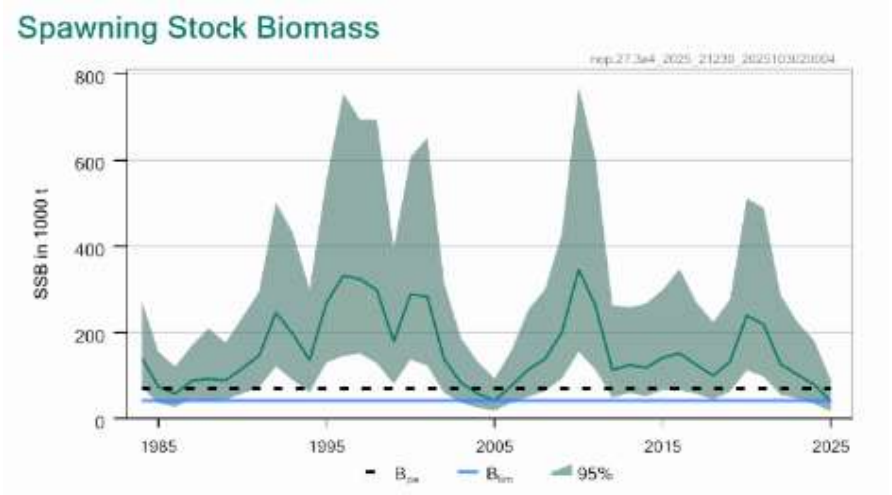
ICES (2025b). Norway pout (Trisopterus esmarkii) in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a (North Sea, Skagerrak, and Kattegat). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202770.v1

A4 Stock status

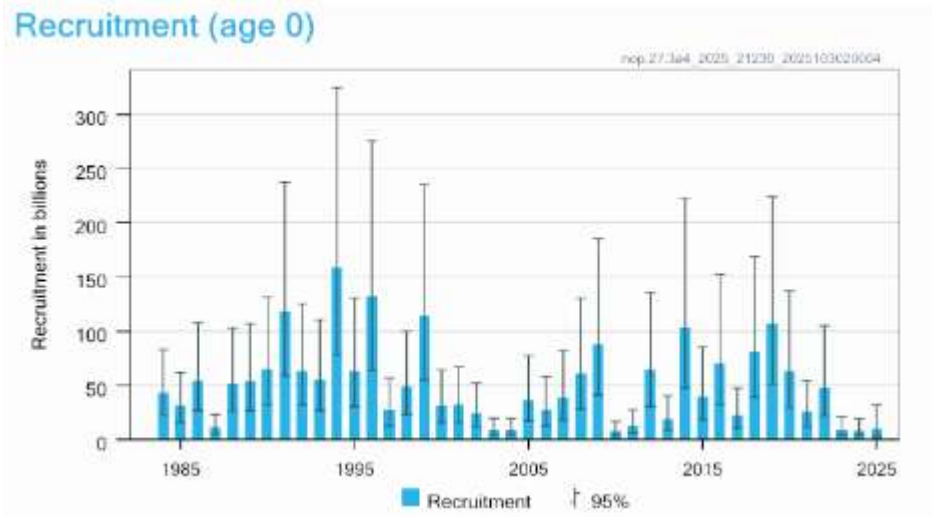
A4.1	**A4.1**	**The stock is at or above the target reference point; OR IF NOT: the stock is above the limit reference point or proxy and there is evidence that a fall below the limit reference point would result in fishery closure; OR IF NOT: the stock is estimated to be below the limit reference point or proxy, but fishery removals are prohibited.**
Outcome	*Pass*	

Rationale

In the last Norway pout stock assessment, it is stated that the spawning-stock biomass (SSB) size is below B_{PA} and B_{lim}. Based on SSB estimates for September 2025, ICES classifies the stock as not having full reproductive capacity by the end of 2025, since recruitment reached historical minima in 2023-2025 as in 2003-2004. Therefore, the advice is that when the MSY approach and precautionary considerations are applied, there should be zero catches from 01 November 2025 to 31 October 2026 (ICES 2025a, ICES 2025b). The TAC may only be fished exclusively for by-catches.



Norway pout in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a. SSB is estimated at the beginning of quarter 4 (ICES 2025b).



Norway pout in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a. Recruitment for quarter 3 (ICES 2025b).

References

ICES (2025a). Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.29085995.v4

ICES (2025b). Norway pout (Trisopterus esmarkii) in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a (North Sea, Skagerrak, and Kattegat). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202770.v1

Category C species

2.2. All clauses must be met for a species to pass the Category C assessment.

2.2.1. Where a species fails this Category C clause, it should be assessed as a Category D species instead, except if there is evidence that the species is currently below the limit reference point.

Blue whiting (*Micromesistius poutassou*)

Subareas 1–9, 12, and 14 (Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters)

C1.1	**C1.1 Fishery removals of the species in the fishery under assessment are included in the stock assessment process OR are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

The latest blue whiting in the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters stock assessment was published in September 2025 by ICES Working Group on Widely Distributed Stocks (WGWIDE). Assessment was carried out using an Age-based analytical assessment (SAM) that uses catches and

surveys in the model and in the forecast (ICES 2025).

Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. catches from 1981-2025, the catch estimate for 2025 is preliminary (ICES 2025).

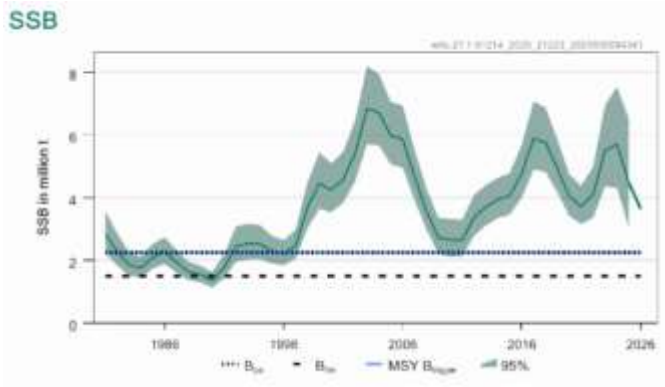
References

ICES (2025). Blue whiting (Micromesistius poutassou) in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14 (Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202938.v1

C1.2	**C1.2 The species is considered, in its most recent stock assessment, to have a biomass above the limit reference point (or proxy), OR removals by the fishery under assessment are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

The 2025 blue whiting assessment indicates that fishing pressure on the stock is above F_{MSY} and F_{pa} and spawning-stock size is above MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa} ,and B_{lim}. The catch advice is that when the long-term management strategy agreed by Norway, the European Union, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and the United Kingdom is applied, catches in 2026 should be no more than 856,344 tonnes (ICES 2025).



Spawning-stock size above MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa} ,and B_{lim} for blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14 (ICES 2025).

References

ICES (2025). Blue whiting (Micromesistius poutassou) in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14 (Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202938.v1

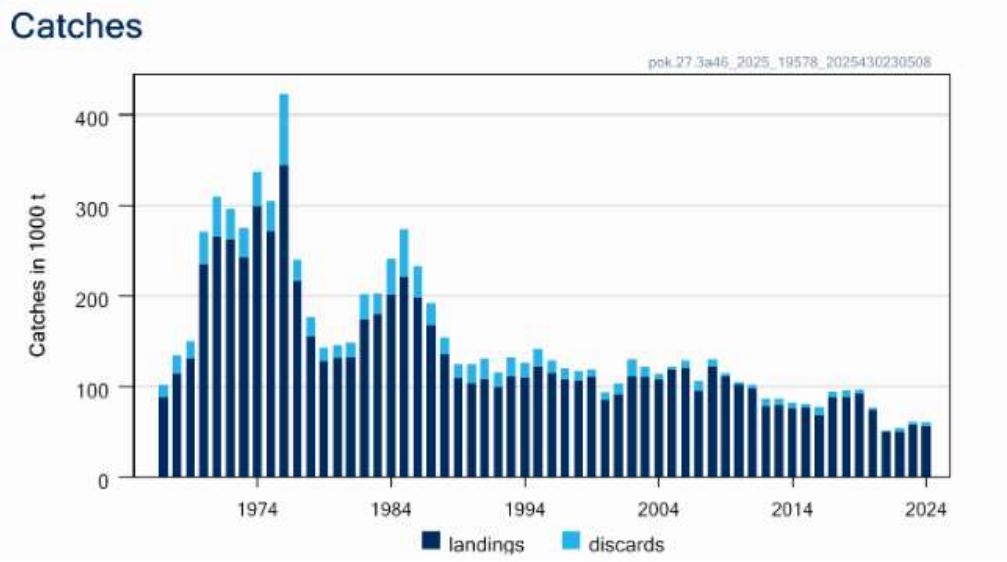
Saithe (*Pollachius virens*)

Subareas 4 and 6, and in Division 3.a (North Sea, Rockall and West of Scotland,Skagerrak and Kattegat)

C1.1	**C1.1 Fishery removals of the species in the fishery under assessment are included in the stock assessment process OR are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

The Saithe in the North Sea, Rockall and West of Scotland, Skagerrak and Kattegat most recent assessment was published in September 2025 by ICES Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK).The assessment was carried out using an Age-based analytical assessment (SAM) that uses catches and surveys in the model and in the forecast (ICES 2025).



Saithe in subareas 4 and 6 and in Division 3.a. catches from 1967-2025 (ICES 2025).

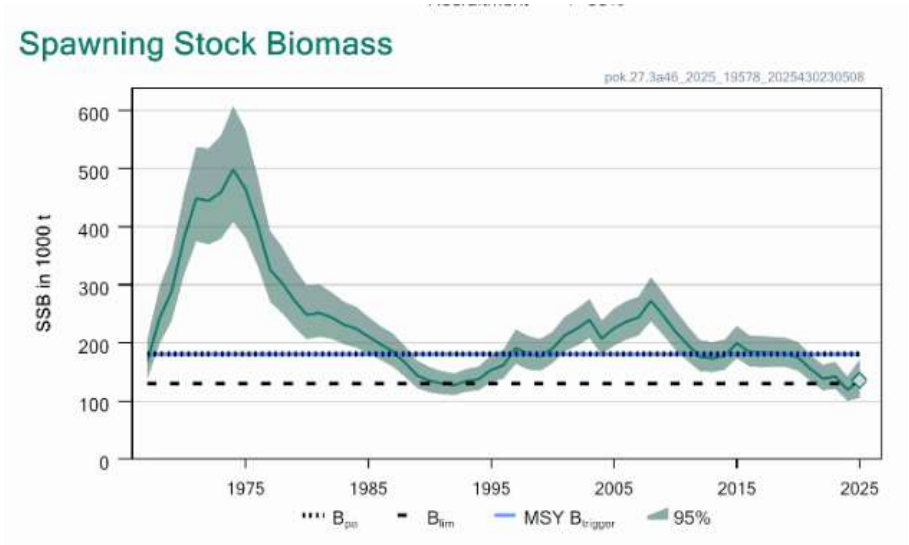
References

ICES (2025). Saithe (Pollachius virens) in subareas 4 and 6, and in Division 3.a (North Sea, Rockall and West of Scotland, Skagerrak and Kattegat). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202797.v2

C1.2	C1.2	The species is considered, in its most recent stock assessment, to have a biomass above the limit reference point (or proxy), OR removals by the fishery under assessment are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.
Outcome	*Pass*	

Rationale

The 2025 Saithe assessment indicates that fishing pressure on the stock is above F_{MSY} but below F_{PA}, and spawning-stock size is below MSY $B_{trigger}$, and between B_{pa} , and B_{lim} The catch advice is that when the MSY approach is applied, catches in 2026 should be no more than 60,167 tonnes. (ICES 2025).



Spawning-stock size below MSY $B_{trigger}$, and between B_{pa} , and B_{lim} for saithe in subareas 4 and 6 and in Division 3.a. (ICES 2025)

References

ICES (2025). Saithe (Pollachius virens) in subareas 4 and 6, and in Division 3.a (North Sea, Rockall and West of Scotland, Skagerrak and Kattegat). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202797.v2

Herring (*Clupea harengus*)

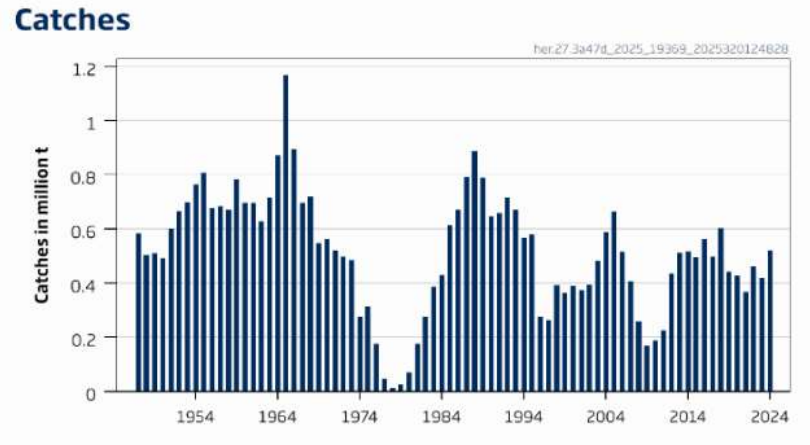
Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d, autumn spawners (North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat, eastern English Channel)

C1.1	C1.1	Fishery removals of the species in the fishery under assessment are included in the stock assessment process OR are considered by scientific

	authorities to be negligible.
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

Herring in the North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat, eastern English Channel most recent assessment was published in April 2025 and updated in October 2025, by ICES Herring Assessment Working Group for the Area South of 62°N (HAWG). The assessment was carried out using an Age-based analytical assessment (SAM) that uses catches and surveys in the model and in the forecast (ICES 2025).



Herring in Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d, autumn spawners. Catches from 1947-2024 (ICES 2025).

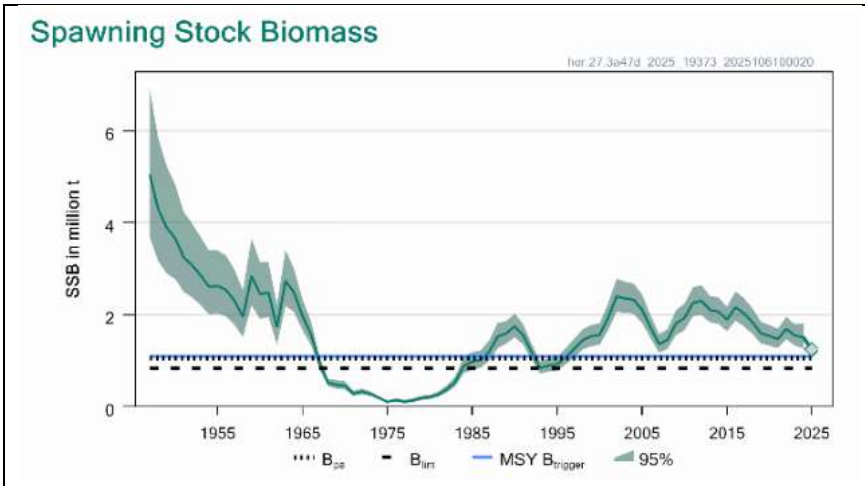
References

ICES (2025). EU, Norway, and UK joint request to incorporate the Long-Term Management Strategy option MS3 (ICES, 2025a) in the advice for herring (Clupea harengus) in Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d, autumn spawners (North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat, eastern English Channel). ICES Advice: Special Requests. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.30305668.v2

C1.2	**C1.2 The species is considered, in its most recent stock assessment, to have a biomass above the limit reference point (or proxy), OR removals by the fishery under assessment are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

The 2023 Herring assessment indicates that fishing pressure on the stock is above F_{MSY} and F_{PA}, while spawning-stock size is above MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa} ,and B_{lim}. The catch advice is that when the MSY approach is applied, catches in 2026 should be no more than 287,772 tonnes for North Sea autumn-spawning (NSAS) herring (ICES 2025).



Spawning-stock size above MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa}, and B_{lim} for Herring in Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d, autumn spawners. The grey diamond in the SSB plot is the predicted biomass for 2026 at spawning time (ICES 2025).

References

ICES (2025). EU, Norway, and UK joint request to incorporate the Long-Term Management Strategy option MS3 (ICES, 2025a) in the advice for herring (Clupea harengus) in Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d, autumn spawners (North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat, eastern English Channel). ICES Advice: Special Requests. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.30305668.v2

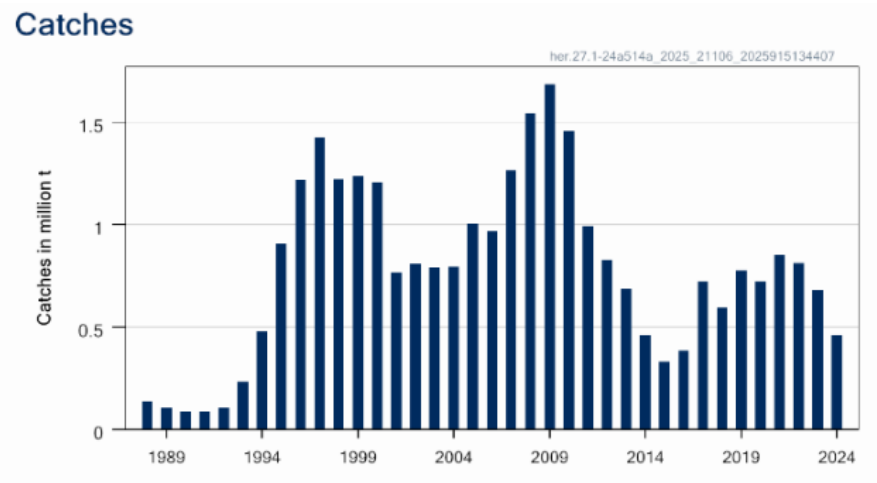
Herring (*Clupea harengus*)

Subareas 1, 2, and 5, and in divisions 4.a and 14.a, Norwegian spring-spawning herring (Northeast Atlantic and Arctic Ocean)

C1.1	**C1.1 Fishery removals of the species in the fishery under assessment are included in the stock assessment process OR are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

Herring in the Northeast Atlantic and Arctic Ocean (ICES subareas 1, 2, and 5, and in divisions 4.a and 14.a) most recent assessment was published in September 2025 by ICES Working Group on Widely Distributed Stocks (WGWIDE). The assessment was carried out using an Age-based analytical model (SAM) that uses commercial catches-at-age and surveys in the model and in the forecast; thus, removals of the species are included in the stock assessment process (ICES 2025).



Herring in subareas 1, 2, and 5, and in divisions 4.a and 14.a, Norwegian spring spawners. Catches from 1988-2024 (ICES 2025).

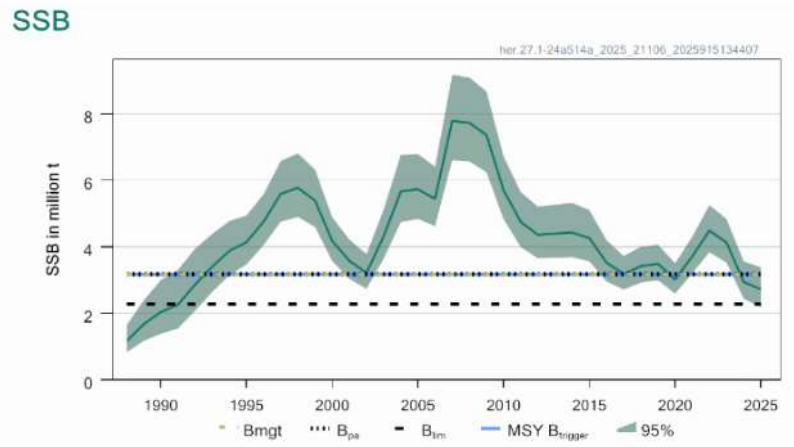
References

ICES (2025). Herring (Clupea harengus) in subareas 1, 2, 5 and divisions 4.a and 14.a, Norwegian spring-spawning herring (the Northeast Atlantic and Arctic Ocean). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202611.v1

C1.2	**C1.2 The species is considered, in its most recent stock assessment, to have a biomass above the limit reference point (or proxy), OR removals by the fishery under assessment are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

The 2025 Herring assessment indicates that fishing pressure on the stock is below F_{MSY} and spawning-stock size is below MSY $B_{trigger}$ and between B_{pa} , and B_{lim} . The catch advice is that when the long-term management strategy agreed by the UK, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, and the European Union is applied, catches in 2026 should be no more than 533,914 tonnes (ICES 2025).



Spawning-stock size below MSY $B_{trigger}$ and between B_{pa}, and B_{lim} for Herring in subareas 1, 2, and 5, and in divisions 4.a and 14.a, Norwegian spring spawners (ICES 2025).

References

ICES (2025). Herring (Clupea harengus) in subareas 1, 2, 5 and divisions 4.a and 14.a, Norwegian spring-spawning herring (the Northeast Atlantic and Arctic Ocean). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202611.v1

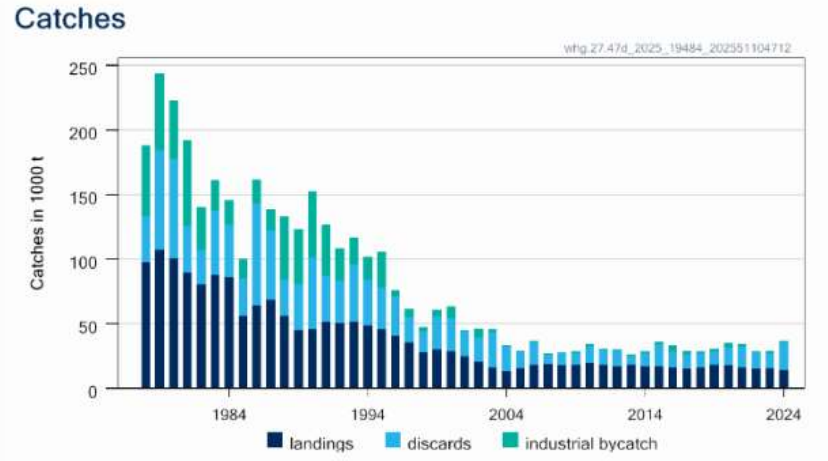
Whiting (Merlangius merlangus)

Subarea 4 and Division 7.d (North Sea and eastern English Channel)

C1.1	**C1.1 Fishery removals of the species in the fishery under assessment are included in the stock assessment process OR are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

The Whiting in the North Sea and Eastern English Channel most recent assessment was published in June 2025 by ICES Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK).The assessment was carried out using an Age-based analytical assessment (SAM) that uses catches and surveys in the model and in the forecast (ICES 2025).



Whiting in Subarea 4 and Division 7.d catches from 1978-2024 (ICES 2025).

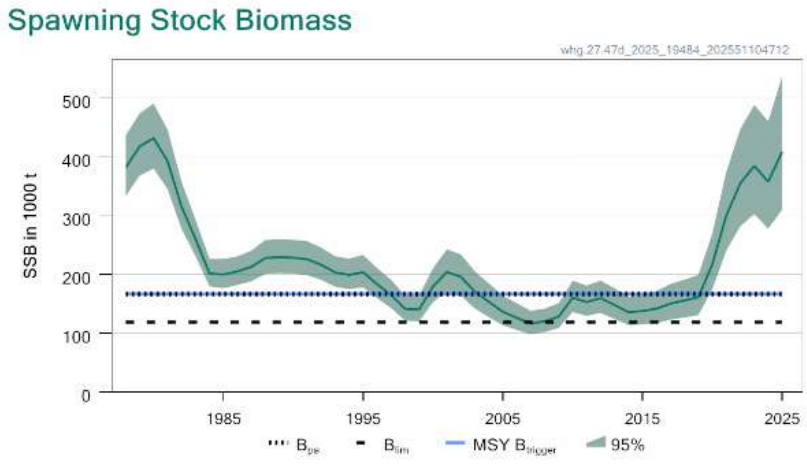
References

ICES (2025). Whiting (Merlangius merlangus) in Subarea 4 and Division 7.d (North Sea and eastern English Channel). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202941.v1

C1.2	**C1.2 The species is considered, in its most recent stock assessment, to have a biomass above the limit reference point (or proxy), OR removals by the fishery under assessment are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

The 2023 Whiting assessment indicates that fishing pressure on the stock is below F_{MSY} and spawning-stock size is above MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa} ,and B_{lim} . The catch advice is that when the MSY approach is applied, total catches in 2026 should be no more than 198,609 tonnes (ICES 2024).



Spawning-stock size above MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa}, and B_{lim} for Whiting in Subarea 4 and Division 7.d (ICES 2025)

References

ICES (2025). Whiting (Merlangius merlangus) in Subarea 4 and Division 7.d (North Sea and eastern English Channel). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202941.v1

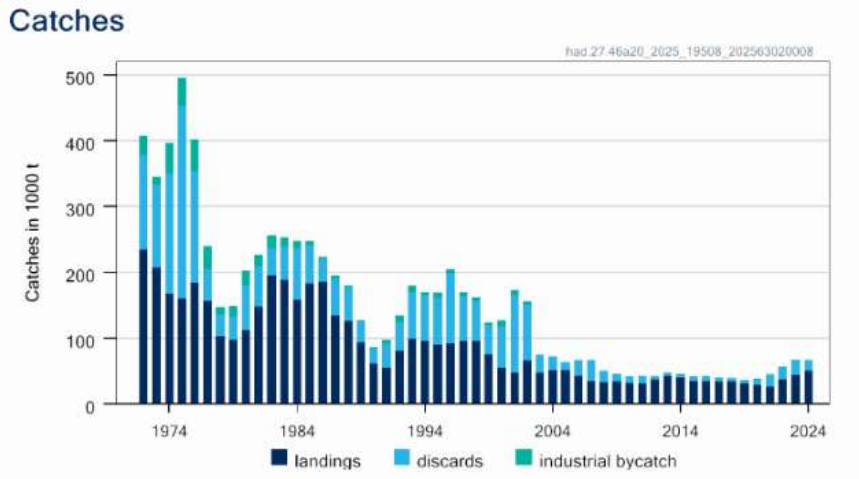
Haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*)

Subarea 4, Division 6.a, and Subdivision 20 (North Sea, West of Scotland, Skagerrak)

C1.1	**C1.1 Fishery removals of the species in the fishery under assessment are included in the stock assessment process OR are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

The last stock assessment of the Haddock in the North Sea, West of Scotland, and Skagerrak was published in June 2025 by the ICES Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). Assessment was carried out using an Age-based analytical assessment (SAM) that uses catches and surveys in the model and in the forecast (ICES 2025).



Haddock in Subarea 4, Division 6.a, and Subdivision 20 catches from 1972-2024 (ICES 2025).

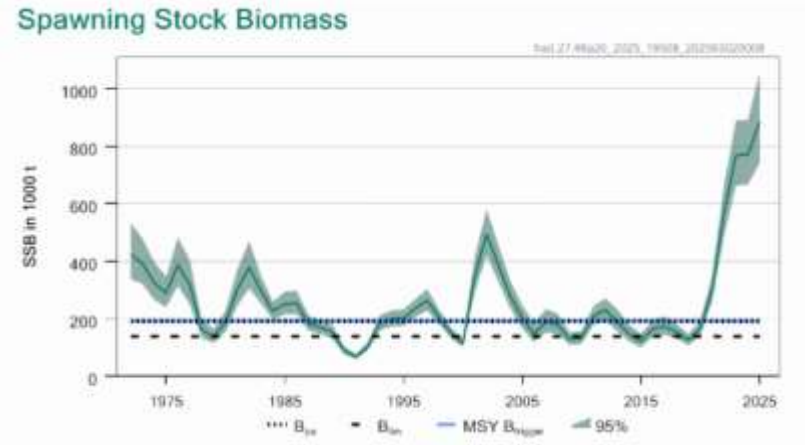
References

ICES (2025). Haddock (Melanogrammus aeglefinus) in Subarea 4, Division 6.a, and Subdivision 20 (North Sea, West of Scotland, Skagerrak). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202596.v1

C1.2	**C1.2 The species is considered, in its most recent stock assessment, to have a biomass above the limit reference point (or proxy), OR removals by the fishery under assessment are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

The 2025 haddock assessment indicates that fishing pressure on the stock is below F_{MSY} and spawning-stock size is above MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa} ,and B_{lim} . The catch advice is that when the MSY approach is applied, total catches in 2026 should be no more than 108,301 tonnes (ICES 2025).



Spawning-stock size above MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa} ,and B_{lim} for Haddock in Subarea 4, Division 6.a, and Subdivision20 (ICES 2025).

References

ICES (2025). Haddock (Melanogrammus aeglefinus) in Subarea 4, Division 6.a, and Subdivision 20 (North Sea, West of Scotland, Skagerrak). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202596.v1

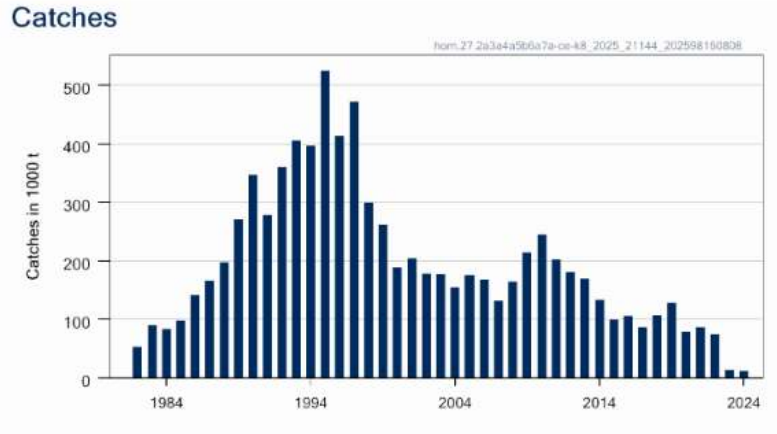
Horse mackerel (*Trachurus trachurus*)

Subarea 8 and divisions 2.a, 3.a, 4.a, 5.b, 6.a, 7.a–c, and 7.e–k (Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters)

C1.1	**C1.1 Fishery removals of the species in the fishery under assessment are included in the stock assessment process OR are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

The Horse mackerel in Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters latest advice was published in September 2025 by the ICES Working Group on Widely Distributed Stocks (WGWIDE). Assessment was carried out using an Age-based analytical assessment (stock synthesis) that uses catches and surveys in the model and in the forecast (ICES 2025).



Horse mackerel in Subarea 8 and divisions 2.a, 3.a, 4.a, 5.b, 6.a, 7.a–c, and 7.e–k catches from 1982-2024 (ICES 2025).

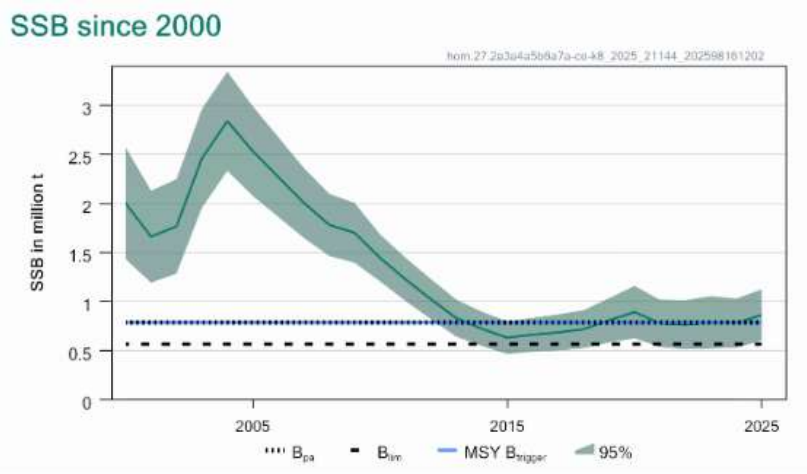
References

ICES (2025). Horse mackerel (Trachurus trachurus) in Subarea 8 and divisions 2.a, 3.a, 4.a, 5.b, 6.a, 7.a–c, and 7.e–k (Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202650.v1

C1.2	**C1.2 The species is considered, in its most recent stock assessment, to have a biomass above the limit reference point (or proxy), OR removals by the fishery under assessment are considered by scientific authorities to be negligible.**
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

The 2024 horse mackerel assessment indicates that fishing pressure on the stock is below F_{MSY} and spawning-stock size is above MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa} ,and B_{lim} . The catch advice is that when the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) approach is applied, catches in 2026 should be no more than 74,214 tonnes (ICES 2025).



Spawning-stock size above MSY $B_{trigger}$, B_{pa}, and B_{lim} for horse mackerel in Subarea 8 and divisions 2.a, 3.a, 4.a, 5.b, 6.a, 7.a–c, and 7.e–k (ICES 2025).

References

ICES (2025). Horse mackerel (Trachurus trachurus) in Subarea 8 and divisions 2.a, 3.a, 4.a, 5.b, 6.a, 7.a–c, and 7.e–k (Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.27202650.v1

Category D species

Category D species are assessed against a risk-based approach.

2.3. The Productivity-Susceptibility Analysis (PSA) in Table D(a) shall be used when assessing Category D species.

2.4. Table D(b) shall be used to calculate the overall PSA risk rating for the Category D species.

2.5. Should the PSA indicate a high risk, further assessment shall be completed against the requirements in Table D(C).

Productivity Susceptibility Analysis (PSA) and scores

Table D(a) provides detailed values and scores for the species productivity and susceptibility attributes and attributes, the assessor shall use Table D(a) to the PSA table.
Table D(b) is used to calculate the overall PSA risk rating for the Category D species.

Species name	Greater silver smelt (*Argentina silus*)	
Productivity attributes	**Value**	**Score**
Average age at maturity	3.3 years[1]	1
Average maximum age	13.5 years[1]	2
Fecundity	6,000 – 24,500[2]	2
Average	70 cm[1]	1

maximum size		
Average size at maturity	23.1 cm[1]	1
Reproductive strategy	Broadcast spawner[1]	1
Mean Trophic Level (MTL)	3.3[1]	3
Density dependence (to be used when scoring invertebrate species only)	NA	NA
Susceptibility attributes		
Areal overlap (availability): Overlap of the fishing effort with a species concentration of the stock	**10-30% overlap** The Norway pout fishery is concentrated in the north-western North Sea, mainly on the Fladen Ground and along the Norwegian Trench. Greater silver smelt has a much broader distribution across the North Sea, North Atlantic, and Arctic regions. Consequently, the overlap between the Norway pout fishery and the greater silver smelt distribution is limited. [1,3]	2
Encounterability: The position of the stock/ species within the water column relative to the fishing gear, and the position of the stock/species within the habitat relative to the position of the gear	**High overlap with fishing gear** Greater silver smelt is a bathypelagic species that prefers depths of 182.8-255.9 m, whereas Norway pout is found at depths of 50-300 m.[3,5]	3
Selectivity of gear type: Potential of the gear to retain species	**Individuals < size at maturity are frequently caught** Norway pout fishery uses small mesh trawls (16-31 mm).[4]	3
Post-capture mortality (PCM): The chance that, if captured, a species would be released and that it would be in a condition permitting subsequent survival	**Retained**[3]	3
Average productivity score		1.57
Average susceptibility score		2.7
PSA risk rating (from Table D(b))		PASS
Compliance rating		PASS

1. Fishbase. Life history data. https://www.fishbase.se/popdyn/KeyfactsSummary_1.php?ID=2700&GenusName=Argentina&SpeciesName=silus&vStockCode=2896&fc=83

2. Fishbase. Fecundity. https://www.fishbase.se/Reproduction/FecundityList.php?ID=2700&GenusName=Argentina&SpeciesName=silus&fc=83&StockCode=2896

3. ICES (2024a). Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.25605639.v2

4. Grimaldo, E., Brinkhof, J., Herrmann, B., Cerbule, K., Grimsmo, L., & Pettersen, H. (2023). Improved bycatch reduction in the mixed demersal trawl fishery for Norway pout (Trisopterus esmarkii). Estuarine, Coastal and Shelf Science, 281, 108189. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272771422004474

5. Fishbase. *Argentina silus*. https://www.fishbase.se/summary/Argentina-silus.html

Ecosystem requirements

This section, or module, assesses the impacts that the fishery under assessment may have on key ecosystem components: ETP species, habitat and the wider ecosystem.

3.1. All ecosystem criteria must be met (pass) for a fishery to pass the Ecosystem Requirements.

3.1.1. The sub-criteria offer a structured evidence base to demonstrate that the fishery sufficiently meets the ecosystem criteria, it is not expected that sub-criteria are assessed independently of the main criterion.

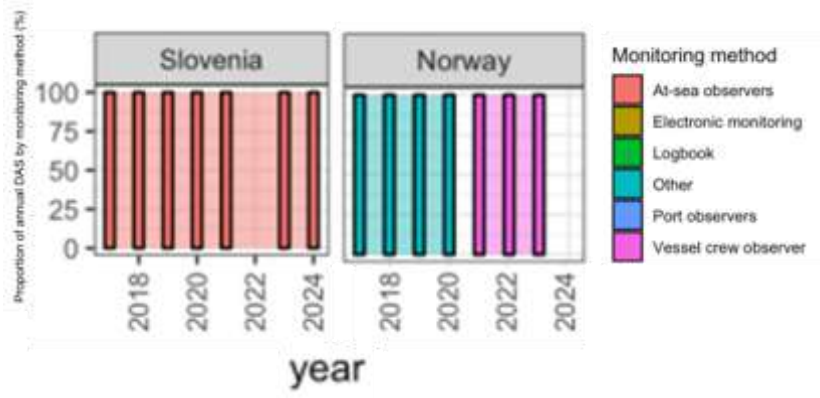
E1 Impact on Endangered, Threatened or Protected species (ETP species)

E1.1	**E1.1 Information on interactions between the fishery and ETP species is collected.** *In reaching a determination for E1.1, the assessor should consider if the following is in place:*
	E1.1.1 ETP species which may be directly affected by the fishery have been identified.
	E1.1.2 Interactions between the fishery and ETP species are recorded and reported to management organisations.
	E1.1.3 Collection and analysis of ETP information is adequate to provide a reliable indication of the impact the fishery has on ETP species.
Outcome	*Pass*
Rationale ICES tracks bycatch of protected species (marine mammals, seabirds, turtles, and certain sensitive fish) across all commercial fishing gears including bottom otter trawls such as those used for Norway pout (ICES 2025a ICES 2025b, ICES 2025c).	

There are several legislative instruments in ICES Member Countries, Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) and other European Union law concerning bycatch of ETP and their record. ICES obtains data on ETP bycatch through an annual data call. These data are mainly collected during at-sea observations carried out for the purposes of fisheries monitoring in accordance with the EU Data Collection Framework Regulation 2017/1004 (DCF) (EU 2021a). While the collection of protected species bycatch data through the DCF as part of the Multiannual Plan (DC-/EU-MAP) (EU 2021b) may facilitate targeted sampling of métiers of concern. (ICES 2025c).

Through the 2025 data call, 22 countries out of 25 responded and submitted data on fishing and sampling effort, and bycatch observations for 2024. In the Greater North Sea ecoregion, 936 marine mammals (7 species), 875 birds (20 species), 13194 elasmobranchs (26 species), 9520 teleosts (21 species), 4 lamprey (1 species) and 6291 deep sea holocephalians (1 species) were reported from 3143 monitoring days at sea (ICES 2025c).

Data for 2024 consisted of monitoring information collected by several different methods (at-sea observers, electronic monitoring, port observers, vessel crew observers, and logbooks) that provide a reliable indication of the impact the fishery has on ETP species. Overall, there has been a temporal change in the proportions of 'monitoring method' data reported to WGBYC, from primarily at-sea-observers in 2017, to vessel crew observers in 2019, and to logbook data in 2021-2024(ICES 2025c). Considering that Norway pout fishery is nearly exclusively performed by Danish and Norwegian vessels, figure 1 shows monitoring methods used by these two countries, although Norway was one of the countries that do not respond to the 2025 ICES data call:



References

EU. 2021a. Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017 on the establishment of a Union framework for the collection, management and use of data in the fisheries sector and support for scientific advice regarding the common fisheries policy and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 199/2008 (recast). https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2017/1004/oj/eng

EU. 2021b.Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/1168 of 27 April 2021 establishing the list of mandatory research surveys at sea and thresholds as part of the multiannual Union programme

for the collection and management of data in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors from 2022. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2021/1168/oj

ICES (2025a). Greater North Sea ecoregion – fisheries overview. ICES Advice: Fisheries Overviews. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.30710897.v1

ICES (2025b). Bycatch of endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) species of marine mammals, seabirds, marine turtles and selected fish species of bycatch relevance. ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.30734714.v1

ICES (2025c). Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC) 2025 Report. ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.30610370.v2

E1.2	**E1.2 The fishery has no significant negative impact on ETP species.** *In reaching a determination for E1.2, the assessor should consider if the following is in place:* E1.2.1 The information collected in relation to E1.1.3 indicates that the fishery does not have a significant negative impact on ETP species.
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

This ICES advice focuses on priority ETP species identified by DG MARE, including marine mammals, seabirds, and marine turtles recognized by ICES as species of bycatch relevance, as well as priority elasmobranch and bony fish species. In 2024, ICES estimated annual bycatch for 39 ETP species across 11 ecoregions and fishing métiers where data met reliability criteria, and provided multiannual bycatch rates (2017–2024) for additional species–ecoregion–métier combinations with sufficient monitoring (ICES 2025a). The list of relevant species by catch by bottom otter trawl in the great North Sea ecoregion indicates that the only Critically Endangered species caught by this fishing gear is the common skate (ICES 2025a) as the following table shows:

Taxon	Common name	Species	IUCN category	Reported bycatch 2024
mammals	short-beaked common	*delphinus delphis*	LC	8
elasmobranchs	common skate	*dipturus intermedius*	CR	211
mammals	gray seal	*halichoerus grypus*	LC	3
seabirds	northern gannet	*morus bassanus*	LC	8
seabirds	great cormorant	*phalacrocorax carbo*	LC	3
mammals	harbor seal	*phoca vitulina*	LC	1
mammals	harbor porpoise	*phocoena phocoena*	LC	1

However, modern common skate distribution is not very abundant but is most frequent around northern Scotland and Ireland, including the northern North Sea (Bache-Jeffreys et al. 2021), which means a very low overlap with the Norway pout, suggesting that these reports are from other fisheries.

A Norwegian reference fleet is used by the Institute of Marine Research (IMR) to collect data on interactions with bycatch and ETP species in order to assess the impact of Norwegian fisheries on those species. For the larger vessels (>28m vessel length) the fisheries prioritised in the High-seas Reference Fleet include, among others, the industrial trawl fisheries targeting sandeel, Norwegian pout and blue whiting for fish-meal production. Landing data for that fleet operating to the south of latitude 62°N and in the North Sea, is provided by the IMR for the period 2015-2018. Common skate catches were not reported, being the only ETP species identified in the catch of this fishery the spurdog (IMR 2020).

Spurdog (*Squalus acanthias*) is listed as *Vulnerable* globally on the IUCN Red List (Finucci et al., 2020) and as *Endangered* in European waters (Ellis et al., 2015; Nieto et al., 2015). Norway progressively restricted and then banned directed spurdog fisheries between 2007 and 2011, allowing only limited bycatch under strict percentage limits, minimum landing size requirements, and additional protections for basking shark, porbeagle, spurdog, and silky shark (ICES, 2024a). A zero TAC for EU vessels was introduced in 2011. ICES has consistently advised against targeted fisheries, recommending that any bycatch be strictly controlled within a management framework and closely monitored (ICES, 2024a). The most recent ICES assessment indicates that the spurdog stock in the Northeast Atlantic is gradually recovering, resulting in the first non-zero MSY-based catch advice since 2009 for the 2023 and 2024 fishing years (ICES, 2024a).

On this basis, the direct effects of the fishery are highly likely not to have a significant negative impact on this ETP species; also, the most recent surveillance report for the North Sea, Skagerak and Kattegat sandeel, sprat and Norway pout fishery MSC Certificate do not report any interaction of the fishery with ETP species (MRAG 2025).

References

Bache-Jeffreys, M., de Moraes, B.L.C., Ball, R.E. et al. Resolving the spatial distributions of Dipturus intermedius and Dipturus batis—the two taxa formerly known as the 'common skate'. Environ Biol Fish 104, 923–936 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10641-021-01122-7

Ellis, J., Soldo, A., Dureuil, M. & Fordham, S. (2015). Squalus acanthias. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2015: e.T91209505A48910866.

Finucci, B., Cheok, J., Chiaramonte, G.E., Cotton, C.F., Dulvy, N.K., Kulka, D.W., Neat, F.C., Pacoureau, N., Rigby, C.L., Tanaka, S. & Walker, T.I. (2020). Squalus acanthias. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2020: e.T91209505A124551959. https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2020-3.RLTS.T91209505A124551959.en.

ICES (2024a). Report of the Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.26935504.v1

ICES (2025a). Bycatch of endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) species of marine mammals, seabirds, marine turtles and selected fish species of bycatch relevance. ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.30734714.v1

IMR (2020). MONITORING BYCATCHES IN NORWEGIAN FISHERIES. Species registered by the Norwegian Reference Fleet 2015-2018. https://www.hi.no/templates/reporteditor/report-pdf?id=31549&48929167

MRAG. 2025. DFPO, DPPO and SPFPO North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat Sandeel, Sprat and Norway Pout. Public certification report. 7 May 2025. https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/dfpo-dppo-and-spfpo-north-sea-skagerrak-and-kattegat-sandeel-sprat-and-norway-pout/@@assessments

Nieto, A., Ralph, G.M., Comeros-Raynal, M.T., Kemp, J., García Criado, M. et al. (2015). European Red List of marine fishes. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, iv + 81 pp

E1.3	**E1.3 There is an ETP management strategy in place for the fishery.** *In reaching a determination for E1.3, the assessor should consider if the following is in place:*	
	E1.3.1	There are measures applied to the fishery which are designed to manage the impacts of the fishery on ETP species.
	E1.3.2	The measures are considered likely to achieve the objectives of regional, national and international legislation relating to ETP species.
Outcome	*Pass*	

Rationale

For fisheries employing small-mesh demersal trawls, such as the Norway pout (*Trisopterus esmarkii*) fishery, ICES and national/regional legislation recognise that technical gear measures and selectivity devices are essential to reduce bycatch of non-target and sensitive species. Under the EU Technical Measures Regulation (Regulation 2019/1241), vessels fishing for small pelagic species including Norway pout must be fitted with a sorting grid with maximum bar spacing of 35 mm or an approved excluder device, and equivalent selectivity devices are permitted where they meet or exceed selectivity performance, as part of efforts to reduce bycatch of larger fish and protected taxa in bottom trawl fisheries (EU 2025).

Scientific evaluations (e.g., by STECF) have noted that netting-based excluder devices can substantially reduce bycatch of bycatch species such as herring, whiting, mackerel, and flatfish relative to traditional rigid sorting grids while maintaining target catch efficiency, supporting improved bycatch mitigation performance in mixed demersal trawl fisheries (Eigaard et al. 2021).

Norway's national fisheries management, governed by the Marine Resources Act which embeds sustainable management and an ecosystem-based approach to harvesting wild marine resources, provides the legal framework for implementing gear regulations, monitoring, and broader measures to minimise impacts on living marine resources, which underpin bycatch mitigation obligations in Norwegian waters (MRA 2008).

ICES also emphasises the need for enhanced bycatch monitoring and reporting systems at Member State and regional level to evaluate effectiveness and ensure that bycatch levels of ETP species are reduced in line with legislative objectives, noting that comprehensive, precise observer data are essential for assessing mitigation performance (ICES 2025)

In combination with EU and national technical measures (including minimum mesh sizes, area closures, and monitoring requirements), these gear-specific mitigation tools are recognised as likely contributors to achieving regional, national, and international conservation objectives for ETP species by reducing unwanted catches and supporting more selective fishing operations.

Regarding to suprdog, measures to reduce the bycatch has been set in the area, including a zero TAC in all EU regulated waters. All alive individuals must be released. According to ICES, the annual catches at the recent assumed level would allow the stock to increase at a rate close to that estimated with zero catches (ICES 2024a).

References

Eigaard, O. R., Herrmann, B., Feekings, J. P., Krag, L. A., & Sparrevohn, C. R. (2021). A netting-based alternative to rigid sorting grids in the small-meshed Norway pout (Trisopterus esmarkii) trawl fishery. *Plos one*, *16*(1), e0246076.

EU (2025). European Commission. Consolidated text: Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on the conservation of fisheries resources and the protection of marine ecosystems through technical measures, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1967/2006, (EC) No 1224/2009 and Regulations (EU) No 1380/2013, (EU) 2016/1139, (EU) 2018/973, (EU) 2019/472 and (EU) 2019/1022 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 894/97, (EC) No 850/98, (EC) No 2549/2000, (EC) No 254/2002, (EC) No 812/2004 and (EC) No 2187/2005. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2019/1241/2025-08-21

ICES (2024a). Report of the Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.26935504.v1

ICES (2025). Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC) 2025 Report. ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.30610370.v2

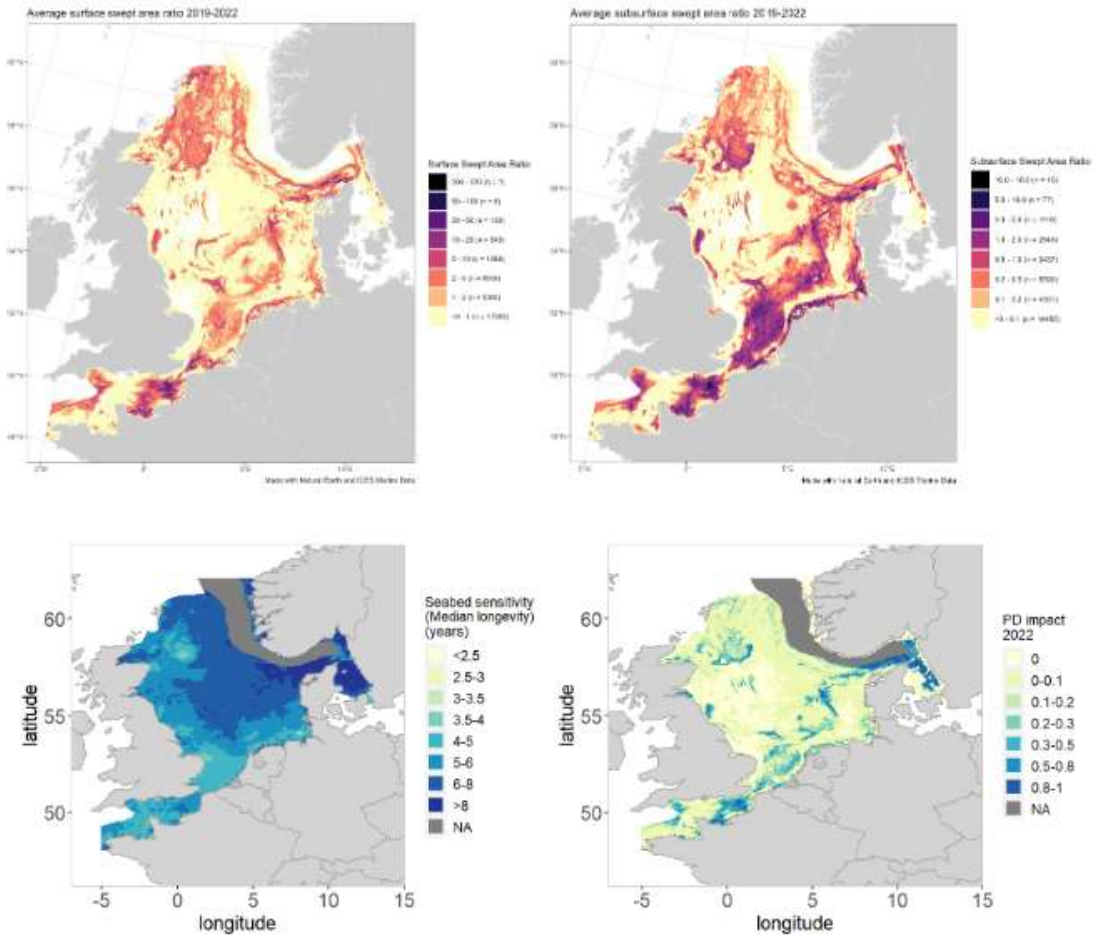
MRA (2008). Marine Resources Act. https://www.regjeringen.no/en/documents/Marine-Resources-Act/id612258/

E2 Impact on the habitat

E2.1	**E2.1 Information on interactions between the fishery and marine habitats is collected.** *In reaching a determination for E2.1, the assessor should consider if the following is in place:*	
	E2.1.1	Habitats which may be directly affected by the fishery have been identified, including any habitats which may be particularly vulnerable.
	E2.1.2	Information on the scale, location and intensity of fishing activity relative to habitats is collected.
	E2.1.3	Collection and analysis of habitat information is adequate to provide a reliable indication of the impact the fishery has on marine habitats.
Outcome	*Pass*	

Rationale

The Norway pout fishery operates using small-mesh demersal trawls and therefore primarily interacts with seabed habitats that are subject to mobile bottom-contacting gear, including offshore sand, mud, and coarse sediment habitats within the Greater North Sea ecoregion (Bigné et al. 2019, ICES 2025a). These habitat types have been identified as those most likely to be directly affected, with offshore mud and coarse sediments considered more vulnerable due to higher fishing frequency and deeper seabed disturbance compared to sandy habitats. Information on the scale, location, and intensity of fishing activity relative to these habitats is systematically collected through vessel monitoring system (VMS) data and related effort metrics, which are used to calculate swept-area ratios at fine spatial resolution. These indicators provide insight into how often fishing gear contacts the seabed and the relative intensity of disturbance across different habitat types. The combination of spatial fishing effort data with habitat distribution and benthic impact indicators, such as population dynamic impact metrics, provides an adequate and reliable basis to assess the extent and magnitude of impacts of the Norway pout fishery on marine habitats and to identify areas where impacts are higher or declining over time (ICES 2025a).



Upper panels: average annual surface (left) and subsurface (right) disturbance by mobile bottom contacting- fishing gear (bottom otter trawls, bottom seines, dredges, beam trawls) in the Greater North Sea ecoregion, expressed as average swept-area ratios (SAR). The scales of surface and subsurface plots differ. In the legend, "n" gives the number of c-squares attributed to that level. Lower panels: assessment results for the benthic fishing impact in 2022. Seabed sensitivity expressed as median longevity in years (left). Bottom-trawl impact expressed as PD-impact indicator (right). n/a = not analysed/assessed because of data unavailability for cells > 200 m depth (ICES 2025a).

References

Bigné, M., Nielsen, J. R., & Bastardie, F. (2019). Opening of the Norway pout box: will it change the ecological impacts of the North Sea Norway pout fishery?. ICES Journal of Marine Science, 76(1), 136-152.

ICES (2025a). Greater North Sea ecoregion – fisheries overview. ICES Advice: Fisheries Overviews. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.30710897.v1

E2.2	**E2.2 The fishery has no significant impact on marine habitats.** *In reaching a determination for E2.2, the assessor should consider if the following is in place:*
	E2.2.1 The information collected in relation to E2.1.3 indicates that the fishery does not have a significant negative impact on marine habitats.
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

The impact of the trawl on the bottom comes from the doors, from the middle-weight (when used), and from the ground rope (Eigaard et al. 2016). The doors and the weight produce trawl tracks on the bottom, while the rope interacts with organisms on the bottom and possibly produce a cloud of mud. The targeted species are fish are living off (not on) the sea bed, therefore, the fishery does not need to scrape the fish off the bottom. This indicates that there is little incentive for the fishery to interact strongly with the bottom, as it will only result in increased fuel costs; also, gear riggings do not use any kind of tickling chains or bobbins on the footrope of the trawl, and consequently the gear has a low surface impact. (MRAG 2017).

Norway pout is benthopelagic species often found just off the bottom on deep mud habitats. Generally, otter trawling is known to cause only subtle changes in the benthic community on mud habitats (Sanchez et al. 2000), with a short-term (2-5 days) negative effect but a longer-term positive effect (Kaiser et al. 2006). Impacts are clearly much smaller than beam trawling. (MRAG 2017).

References

Eigaard, O. R., Bastardie, F., Breen, M., Dinesen, G. E., Hintzen, N. T., Laffargue, P., ... & Rijnsdorp, A. D. (2016). Estimating seabed pressure from demersal trawls, seines, and dredges based on gear design and dimensions. ICES Journal of Marine Science, 73(suppl_1), i27-i43.

Kaiser, M.J., Clarke, K.R., Hinz, H., Austen, M.C.V., Somerfield, P.J. and Karakassis, I. (2006). Global analysis of response and recovery of benthic biota to fishing. Marine Ecology Progress Series, 311, 1-14

MRAG Americas, Inc. (2017). DFPO, DPPO and SPFPO North Sea, Skagerak and Kattegat sandeel, sprat and Norway pout fishery. MSC Final Report and Determination. https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/dfpo-dppo-and-spfpo-north-sea-skagerrak-and-kattegat-sandeel-sprat-and-norway-pout/@@assessments

Sanchez, P., Demestre, M., Ramon, M., & Kaiser, M. J. (2000). The impact of otter trawling on mud communities in the northwestern Mediterranean. ICES Journal of Marine Science, 57(5), 1352-1358.

E2.3	**E2.3 There is a habitat management strategy in place for the fishery.** *In reaching a determination for E2.3, the assessor should consider if the following is in place:*	
	E2.3.1	There are measures applied to the fishery which are designed to manage the impact of the fishery on marine habitats.
	E2.3.2	The measures are considered likely to prevent the fishery from having a significant negative impact on marine habitats.
Outcome	*Pass*	

Rationale

The EU regulations includes the Natura 2000 network, designated under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, (92/43/EEC, 2009/147/EC), which aims to maintain and restore habitats that support a number of species that form qualifying features to these designations. The habitat directive states: "This network, composed of sites hosting the natural habitat types listed in Annex I and habitats of the species listed in Annex II, shall enable the natural habitat types and the species' habitats concerned to be maintained or, where appropriate, restored at a favourable conservation status in their natural range" (article 3) and further: "For special areas of conservation, Member States shall establish the necessary conservation measures involving, if need be, appropriate management plans specifically designed for the sites or integrated into other development plans, and appropriate statutory, administrative or contractual measures which correspond to the ecological requirements of the natural habitat types in Annex I and the species in Annex II present on the sites" (article 6). (EU 2025a). Also, Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 on the conservation of fisheries resources and the protection of marine ecosystems through technical measures also contemplates in its article 21 the introduction of measures to minimise the impacts of fishing gear on sensitive habitats (EU 2025b).

Existing EU technical measures for the Norway pout fishery are designed to support an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management. These measures include the closed Norway pout box, minimum mesh size requirements, and bycatch regulations aimed at protecting non-target species, all of which remain in force for directed fishing in EU waters. Norwegian vessels operating in both EU and Norwegian waters are required to use sorting grids, which reduce unwanted bycatch and the discarding of juvenile Norway pout, thereby contributing to healthier stock structure and reduced ecosystem impacts. When the Norway pout box is closed, all fishing activities using both trawl and pelagic gears are prohibited, ensuring that no fishing operations interact with the seabed and providing effective protection for benthic habitats and associated ecosystems (ICES 2025a).

In Norway, the Marine Resources Act requires the Ministry to assess and implement management measures necessary to ensure the sustainable use of wild living marine resources, applying an ecosystem-based approach that explicitly considers habitats and biodiversity (MRA 2008), while the Nature Diversity Act aims to maintain the diversity of habitat types within their natural ranges, as well as the species diversity and ecological processes characteristic of each habitat type (NG 2026).

To protect marine habitats, a range of management measures has been implemented in Norwegian waters (MTIF 2019, MRA 2008):

- Norwegian regulation regulating bottom gears to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems

- Trawling is forbidden within the majority of the 12 nautical mile limit from Norwegian baselines (in some instances, this limit is set at 6 nautical miles). Much of the cold-water coral reefs are located within this limit

- When a trawl vessel catches more than 30 kgs of coral or 400 kg of sponges in a single haul, the vessel shall stop fishing and move position at least 2 nautical miles in order to avoid such catches. The incident must be reported to the Directorate of Fisheries

- When fishing in a new fishing area in the Norwegian EEZ or the Svalbard, vessels must have a special permit from the Directorate of Fisheries

- Fishing below 1000 m within the Norwegian EEZ is banned in order to protect deep-water sensitive habitats and species.

References

EU (2025a). European Union. Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A01992L0043-20250714

EU (2025b). European Union. Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on the conservation of fisheries resources and the protection of marine ecosystems through technical measures, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1967/2006, (EC) No 1224/2009 and Regulations (EU) No 1380/2013, (EU) 2016/1139, (EU) 2018/973, (EU) 2019/472 and (EU) 2019/1022 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 894/97, (EC) No 850/98, (EC) No 2549/2000, (EC) No 254/2002, (EC) No 812/2004 and (EC) No 2187/2005. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02019R1241-20250821

ICES (2025a). Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.29085995.v4

MRA (2008). Marine Resources Act. https://www.regjeringen.no/en/documents/Marine-Resources-Act/id612258/

MTIF (2019). Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries. Regulations on the regulation of fishing to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems. https://lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2011-07-01-755

NG (2026). Norway Government. Nature Diversity Act. https://www.regjeringen.no/en/documents/nature-diversity-act/id570549/

E3 Impact on the ecosystem

E3.1	**E3.1 Information on the potential impacts of the fishery on marine ecosystems is collected.** *In reaching a determination for E3.1, the assessor should consider if the following is in place:*	
	E3.1.1	The main elements of the marine ecosystems in the area(s) where the fishery takes place have been identified.
	E3.1.2	The role of the species caught in the fishery within the marine ecosystem is understood, either through research on this specific fishery or inferred from other fisheries.
	E3.1.3	Collection and analysis of ecosystem information is adequate to provide a reliable indication of the impact the fishery has on marine ecosystems.
Outcome	*Pass*	

Rationale

The Norway pout fishery operates primarily within the Greater North Sea ecoregion, including the North Sea, Skagerrak, and Norwegian Trench (ICES 2025a). The main ecosystem elements of this region are comprehensively identified and described by ICES, including:

- Physical environment: shallow continental shelf areas, deeper waters of the Norwegian Trench, and a range of sediment types (mud, sand, coarse sediments);
- Biological components: pelagic, demersal, and benthic fish communities; benthic invertebrates; seabirds; marine mammals; and vulnerable benthic habitats;
- Trophic structure: lower-trophic forage species (including Norway pout and sandeel), higher trophic predators, and benthic fauna;
- Pressures: fishing (including small-meshed trawl fisheries), climate variability, and other human activities.

These ecosystem components are synthesized and spatially contextualized through ICES ecosystem overviews and fisheries overviews for the Greater North Sea, which explicitly include fisheries for small pelagic and semi-pelagic species such as Norway pout (ICES 2024, ICES 2025b).

Norway pout is well understood as a key forage species in the Greater North Sea ecosystem and it is identify as a mid-trophic-level species feeding mainly on zooplankton and small invertebrates; an important prey species for higher trophic-level predators, including cod, haddock, saithe, marine mammals, and seabirds; and it is ecologically comparable to other industrial forage species (e.g. sandeel and sprat), with ecosystem relevance explicitly considered in multispecies and ecosystem contexts. The ecosystem role of Norway pout is therefore understood directly, through stock-specific research and ICES working group assessments; and indirectly, through its inclusion in multispecies considerations and ecosystem-level analyses for the Greater North Sea (ICES 2025a, ICES 202b).

The Greater North Sea have a very comprehensive ecosystem data collection framework where Key elements include (ICES 2024, ICES 2025a, ICES 2025b):

- Regular stock assessments for Norway pout conducted by ICES, informed by survey data, catch reporting, and biological sampling;
- Observer programmes and reference fleets, providing information on catches, discards, and bycatch;
- Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) and spatial effort data used to evaluate fishing pressure and seabed interaction;
- Ecosystem indicators, including benthic habitat pressure indicators and trends in fishing impacts on the seabed;
- Integrated ecosystem and fisheries overviews, which explicitly assess the effects of fishing on habitats, food-web structure, and non-target species.

Also, ICES conducts ecosystem overviews using risk-based methods to identify the main human pressures and explain how these affect key ecosystem components in each ICES ecoregion providing information on trends in the ecosystem and giving the context for ecosystem-based management (ICES 2026a). The ICES regional ecosystem overviews are based on knowledge and information developed through a series of dedicated ICES workshops and processes, including benchmarking of integrated ecosystem assessments, the development and drafting of ecosystem overviews, the design of third-generation ecosystem overviews, and the establishment of methods to link human activities, pressures, and ecosystem state. These processes culminated in the work of the Advice Drafting Group on Ecosystem Overviews, which provided the theoretical framework and final structure for the documents (ICES 2024).

References

ICES (2024). Greater North Sea ecoregion - Ecosystem Overview. ICES Advice: Ecosystem Overviews. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.25714239.v1

ICES (2025a). Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.29085995.v4

ICES (2025b). Greater North Sea ecoregion – fisheries overview. ICES Advice: Fisheries Overviews. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.30710897.v1

ICES (2026a). Ecosystem overviews. https://www.ices.dk/advice/ESD/Pages/Ecosystem-overviews.aspx

E3.2	**E3.2 There is no substantial evidence that the fishery has a significant negative impact on the marine ecosystem.** *In reaching a determination for E3.2, the assessor should consider if the following is in place:*
	E3.2.1 The information collected in relation to E3.1.3 indicates that the fishery

	does not have a significant negative impact on marine ecosystems.
Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

The available information indicates that the Norway pout fishery is not considered to have a significant negative impact on marine ecosystems at the ecoregional scale. ICES analyses show that fishing mortality on Norway pout is generally low relative to natural mortality, the stock is managed under an escapement-based approach, and the species plays a well-understood role as a forage fish in the Greater North Sea ecosystem (ICES 2025a, ICES 2025b). Ecosystem-level assessments indicate that impacts from the fishery are monitored through comprehensive data collection programmes, and no evidence has been identified of ecosystem-level degradation attributable to the Norway pout fishery beyond the pressures already accounted for in regional fisheries and ecosystem evaluations (ICES 2024)

As described in Sections E1 and E2 of this report, interactions with endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) species and physical disturbance of the seabed associated with the Norway pout fishery are low; also existing technical measures, including the closed Norway pout box, minimum mesh size requirements, and bycatch regulations aimed at protecting other species, have been maintained.

Taken together, and in combination with the effective management of the Norway pout fishery (see Sections M and A), the available evidence indicates that the fishery does not have a significant negative impact on the marine ecosystem in which it operates.

References

ICES (2024). Greater North Sea ecoregion - Ecosystem Overview. ICES Advice: Ecosystem Overviews. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.25714239.v1

ICES (2025a). Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.29085995.v4

ICES (2025b). Greater North Sea ecoregion – fisheries overview. ICES Advice: Fisheries Overviews. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.30710897.v1

E3.3	**E3.3 There is an ecosystem management strategy in place for the fishery.** *In reaching a determination for E3.3, the assessor should consider if the following is in place:*	
	E3.3.1	There are measures applied to the fishery which are designed to manage the impacts of the fishery on marine ecosystems.
	E3.3.2	The measures are considered likely to prevent the fishery from having a significant negative impact on marine ecosystems.

Outcome	*Pass*

Rationale

There are a range of management measures applied to the Norway pout fishery that are explicitly designed to manage and mitigate its impacts on marine ecosystems. The fishery is regulated through a combination of technical, spatial, and regulatory measures, including minimum mesh sizes for small-meshed trawls, mandatory or widely implemented selective devices such as sorting grids, bycatch regulations, and minimum landing sizes for associated species. Spatial management measures, most notably the closed "Norway pout box", restrict fishing activity in areas where bycatch risk or ecosystem sensitivity is higher. In addition, the fishery is managed under an escapement-based strategy, with catch limits and real-time management advice provided by ICES to ensure that sufficient biomass remains in the ecosystem to support predator species. These measures are embedded within the broader management and monitoring framework of the Greater North Sea ecoregion, as described in the ICES Ecosystem Overview and Fisheries Overview, and are supported by ongoing data collection through surveys, observer programmes, reference fleets, and vessel monitoring systems (ICES 2024, ICES 2025a, ICES 2025b).

The available evidence provided through this document indicates that these measures are likely to prevent the Norway pout fishery from having a significant negative impact on marine ecosystems. The Norway pout abundance is generally low relative to natural mortality, the bycatch levels of other commercial species have been relatively low and have declined over time, and interactions with ETP species are limited. The ecosystem role of Norway pout as a key forage species is explicitly considered in ICES advice, and management aims to maintain sufficient stock biomass to support predator populations. Furthermore, analyses of benthic pressures in the Greater North Sea indicate that impacts from fisheries are spatially assessed and monitored, and no ecosystem-level degradation has been attributed specifically to the Norway pout fishery beyond pressures already accounted for in regional evaluations. On this basis, and in combination with the continued application and refinement of technical and spatial measures, we can conclude that the Norway pout fishery is unlikely to cause significant negative impacts on marine ecosystems under current management conditions (ICES 2024, ICES 2025a, ICES 2025b).

References

ICES (2024). Greater North Sea ecoregion - Ecosystem Overview. ICES Advice: Ecosystem Overviews. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.25714239.v1

ICES (2025a). Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.29085995.v4

ICES (2025b). Greater North Sea ecoregion – fisheries overview. ICES Advice: Fisheries Overviews. Report. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.30710897.v1

Annex 1: External Peer Review report

Assessment and determination summary

Fishery name	**Norway - Trisopterus esmarkii - Norway Pout - FAO 27, ICES 3.a, 4**
MarinTrust report code	**WF01**
Type 1 species (common name, Latin name)	*Norway pout (Trisopterus esmarkii)*
Fishery location	*Norway*
Gear type(s)	*Small-meshed trawls*
Management authority (country/state)	*Norway, EU*
Certification Body recommendation	*Approved*
FAPRG reviewer recommendation	Agree with CB determination

Summary of peer review outcomes

Summary *Provide any information about the fishery that the reviewers feel is significant to their decision. This summary is used by the Certification Body in the Fishery Assessment Report.*
Norway pout is an species under a very delicated situation. However, if all previsions as described are met the assesssment can be approved. Apparentlly all the available information has been gathered. ICES, through the WGNSSK, assesses Norway pout using an age-based analytical model but it might not be enough in the near future, financial effort should be made to test direct methods of analysis as the swept area method. It is urgent to get a closer coordination with ICES and EU to strength the scientific advice for this group of species. It is particularly concerning the very low level of spawners which in consequence produces also low recruitments. Is also matter of concern the low level of spawning biomass in the case of saithe, herring. Finally, is also motive of concern the relatively high by catch of elasmobranchs.
General comments on the draft report provided to the peer reviewer
The report is complete in the sense that contains all essential information needed to have a clear idea of the state of assessed species, also considering that this is a very complex fishery. The extension of the document reflects it, containing many references to be consulted to further clarification of the scororing.

Peer reviewers should review the fishery assessment report with the primary objective of answering the key questions listed in the table below. When the situation is more complicated, reviewers may answer "See Notes" instead.

1. Has the fishery assessment been fully completed, using the recognised MarinTrust fishery assessment methodology and associated guidance?	Yes
2. Does the Species Categorisation section of the report reflect the best current understanding of the catch composition of the fishery?	Yes
3. Are the scores in the following sections consistent with the MarinTrust requirements (i.e. do the scores reflect the evidence	Yes

provided)?	
Section M – Management Requirements	Yes
Category A Species	Yes
Category B Species	n/a
Category C Species	Yes
Category D Species	Yes
Section E – Ecosystem Impacts	Yes

Detailed Peer Review Justification

Peer reviewers should provide support for their answers in the boxes provided, by referring to specific scoring issues and any relevant documentation as appropriate.
Detailed justifications are only required where answers given are one of the 'No' options. In other (Yes) cases, either confirm 'scoring agreed' or identify any places where weak rationales could be strengthened (without any implications for the scores).
Boxes may be extended if more space is required.

1. Has the fishery assessment been fully completed, using the recognised MarinTrust fishery assessment methodology and associated guidance?	Yes
scoring agreed	
Certification Body response	

2. Does the species categorisation section of the report reflect the best current understanding of the catch composition of the fishery?	Yes
scoring agreed	
Certification Body response	
scoring agreed	

3. Is the scoring of the fishery consistent with the MarinTrust requirements, and clearly based on the evidence presented in the assessment report?	Yes
scoring agreed	
Certification Body response	

3a. Are the “Category A Species” scores clearly justified?	Yes
scoring agreed	
Certification Body response	

3b. Are the “Category B Species” scores clearly justified?	n/a
Certification Body response	

3c. Are the “Category C Species” scores clearly justified?	Yes
scoring agreed	
Certification Body response	

3d. Are the “Category D Species” scores clearly justified?	Yes
scoring agreed	
Certification Body response	

Are the scores in “Section M – Management Requirements” clearly justified?	Yes
scoring agreed	
Certification Body response	

Are the scores in “Section E – Ecosystem Impacts” clearly justified?	Yes

scoring agreed
Certification Body response

Optional: General peer reviewer comments on the draft report
If in the next assessment the situation of (mainly) norway pout is not noticeable improved this fishery should not be approved under the Marin Trust standard.
Certification Body response